

T H E
ENGLISH PREACHER.

VOL. VI.



THE
ENGLISH PREACHER:

O R,

S E R M O N S

ON THE PRINCIPAL SUBJECTS OF
RELIGION AND MORALITY,

SELECTED, REVISED, AND ABRIDGED FROM

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ENGLISH PREACHER

S. B. T. M. O. N.

ON THE PRINCIPAL PARTS OF



THE HISTORY OF THE

VOLUME THE SECOND

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LONDON

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SERMON I.

THE HAPPINESS OF A HEAVENLY CONVERSATION.

PHILIPPIANS III. 20.

For our conversation is in heaven.

THE word which is here translated "conversation," may either signify the privilege of citizens, or their conversation and manners, or may take in both these. In the former sense, the words may properly be rendered, "our citizenship is in heaven;" an allusion

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perhaps

perhaps to those, who, though they were not born at Rome, and it may be lived at a great distance from it, had yet the privilege of Roman citizens. In like manner the Apostle here describes the condition of Christians. It is true, we are born here in this world and live in it, but we belong to another state; we are denizens of another country, and free of that city which is above. In the other sense of the conversation of citizens we find the word used towards the beginning of this Epistle, "Let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ." And why may not the phrase in the text, without any inconvenience include both these? as if the Apostle had said; there are some that mind earthly things, and are so addicted to them, that rather than part with them they will forsake their religion; but as for us, we consider that we are citizens of heaven, and accordingly converse and demean ourselves in this world as those that are free of another world and belong to it.

So that to have "our conversation in heaven," implies these two things; the serious thought and consideration of heaven;

heaven ; and the effect which those thoughts ought to have upon our lives.

Concerning the heavenly world there are two things which principally offer themselves to our consideration ; the happiness of this state ; and the way and means whereby we may come to partake of this happiness.

First ; Let us consider the happiness of this state. But what, and how great this happiness is, I am not able to represent to you. These things are yet in a great measure within the veil, and it does not now fully "appear what we shall be." The scriptures, however, have revealed so much in general concerning the reality and unspeakable felicities of this state, as may satisfy us for the present, and serve to inflame our desires after it, and to quicken our endeavours for the obtaining of it : they instruct us, that it is incomparably beyond any happiness of this world ; that it is very great ; and that it is eternal ; in a word, that it is far above any thing that we can now conceive or imagine.

It is incomparably beyond any happiness in this world. It is free from all those sharp and bitter ingredients which

abate and allay the felicities of this life. All the enjoyments of this world are mixed, uncertain, and unsatisfying; nay so far are they from giving us satisfaction, that the very sweetest of them are fatiating and cloying.

None of the comforts of this life are pure and unmixed. There is something of vanity mingled with all our earthly enjoyments, and that causeth "vexation of spirit." There is no sensual pleasure which is not either purchased by some pain, or attended with it, or ends in it. A great estate is neither to be got without care, nor kept without fear, nor lost without trouble. Dignity and greatness is troublesome almost to all mankind; it is commonly uneasy to those that have it, and it is usually hated and envied by those that have it not. Knowledge is one of the best and sweetest pleasures of human life; and yet if we may believe the experience of one who had as great a share of it as any of the sons of men ever had, he will tell us, that "this also is
"vexation of spirit; for in much wisdom
"there is much grief, and he that in-
"creaseth knowledge, increaseth sorrow."

Thus

Thus it is with all the things of this world; the best of them have a mixture of good and evil, of joy and sorrow in them: but the happiness of the next life is free from alloy and mixture. In the description of the new Jerusalem it is said, that "there shall be no more curse, and there shall be no night there;" nothing to imbitter our blessings, or obscure our glory. Heaven is the proper region of happiness, there only are pure joys and an unmingled felicity.

But the enjoyments of this world as they are mixed, so they are uncertain. So wavering and inconstant are they, that we can have no security of them; when we think ourselves to have the fastest hold of them, they slip out of our hands we know not how. For this reason Solomon very elegantly calls them things "that are not." "Why wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make to themselves wings and fly like an eagle towards heaven." So fugitive are they, that after all our endeavours to secure them, they may break loose from us, and in an instant vanish out of our sight; "riches make to themselves wings, and fly
B 3 "like

“like an eagle.” He that enjoys the greatest happiness of this world, still wants one happiness more, to secure to him for the future what he possesses for the present. But the happiness of heaven is a steady and constant light, fixed and unchangeable as the fountain from whence it springs, “the Father of lights, “with whom is no variableness nor shadow of turning.”

And if the enjoyments of this life were certain, yet they are unsatisfying. This is the “vanity of vanities,” that every thing in this world can trouble us, but nothing can give us satisfaction. I know not how it is, but either we, or the things of this world, or both, are so fantastical, that we can neither be well with these things, nor well without them. If we be hungry, we are in pain; and if we eat to the full, we are uneasy. If we be poor, we think ourselves miserable; and when we come to be rich, we commonly are so in reality. If we are in a low condition, we fret and murmur; and if we be raised to greatness, we are frequently farther from contentment than we were before. So that we pursue the happiness of this world just as little children

dren chase birds; when we think we are come very near it and have it almost in our hands, it flies farther from us than it was at first.

Nay so far are the enjoyments of this world from affording us satisfaction, that the sweetest of them are most apt to satiate and cloy us. All the pleasures of this world are so contrived as to yield us very little happiness. If they go off quickly, they signify nothing; and if they stay long, we are sick of them. But the delights of the other world, as they will give us full satisfaction, so we shall never be weary of them. Every repetition of them will be accompanied with new enjoyment. In the felicities of heaven these two things shall be reconciled; which never met together in any sensual delight; long and full enjoyment, and yet a fresh and perpetual pleasure. As "in God's presence there is fulness of joy," so "at his right hand there shall be pleasures for evermore."

Further; The happiness of the other life is not only incomparably beyond any happiness of this world, but it is very great in itself. The happiness of heaven is usually in scripture described

to us by such pleasures as are manly and excellent, chaste and intellectual, infinitely more pure and refined than those of sense; and if the scriptures at any time descend to the metaphors of a feast, a banquet, and a marriage, it is plainly by way of accommodation to our weakness, and condescension to our capacities.

The chief ingredients of this happiness, so far as the scriptures have thought fit to reveal it to us, are the perfection of our knowledge, and the height of our love, and the perpetual society and friendship of all the blessed inhabitants of those glorious mansions; and the joyful concurrence of all these in chearful expressions of gratitude, in the incessant praises and admiration of the Fountain and Author of all this happiness. And what can be more delightful than to have our understandings entertained with a clear sight of the best and most perfect Being, with the knowledge of all his works, and of the wise designs of his providence? than to live in the reviving presence of God, and to be continually attending upon Him whose favour is life, and

and whose glory is much more above that of any of the princes of this world, than the greatest of them is above the meanest worm? The Queen of Sheba thought Solomon's servants happy in having the opportunity of standing continually before him to hear his wisdom; but in the other world it shall be a happiness to Solomon himself, and to the wisest and greatest persons that ever were in this world, to stand before this great King, to admire his wisdom, and to behold his glory. Not that I imagine the happiness of heaven to consist in an idle contemplation of the Divine glories; for the scripture tells us we shall be transformed into the image of the Divine perfections; "we shall see God, and we shall be like him:" and what greater happiness can there be than to be like the happiest and most perfect Being in the world? Besides, who can tell what employment God may have for us in the next life? We need not doubt but that he who is happiness itself, and hath promised to make us happy, can easily find out such employments and delights for us in the other world, as will be proper and suitable to that state.

Besides the improvement of our knowledge, there shall be the most delightful exercise of love. When we come to heaven we shall enter into the society of the blessed Angels, and of "the spirits of just men made perfect," that is, freed from all those passions and infirmities which now render the conversation even of the best men sometimes troublesome to one another. We shall then meet with all those excellent persons, those brave minds, those innocent and charitable souls, whom we have seen, and heard, and read of in this world. There we shall meet with many of our dear relations and intimate friends; and perhaps with many of our enemies, to whom we shall then be perfectly reconciled, notwithstanding all the warm contests and peevish indifferences which we had with them in this world, even about matters of religion. For heaven is a state of perfect love and friendship, where there will be nothing but kindness and good nature. And what greater happiness can be imagined, than to converse freely with so many excellent persons, without any thing of folly or disguise, of jealousy or design upon one another? For then
there

there will be none of those vices and passions of covetousness and ambition, of envy and hatred, of wrath and peevishness, which now so much spoil the pleasure, and disturb the quiet of mankind. All quarrels and contentions, schisms and divisions, will then be effectually hindered, not by force, but by love; not by compulsion, but by that "charity which never faileth:" and all those controversies in religion which are now so warmly agitated, will then be finally determined, not as we endeavour to end them now, by canons and decrees, but by a perfect knowledge and convincing light.

And when this blessed society is met together, and thus united by love, they shall all join in gratitude to their great Patrons and Benefactors, "to him that sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb that was slain, to God even our Father, and to our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood." And they shall sing everlasting songs of praise to God for all his works of wonder, for the effects of that infinite goodness, admirable wisdom, and almighty power, which

are clearly seen in the creation and government of the world, and of all the creatures in it; particularly for his favours to mankind, for the benefit of their beings, for the comfort of their lives, and for all his merciful providences towards them in this world: but above all, for the redemption of their souls by the death of his Son, for the free forgiveness of their sins, for the gracious assistance of his holy Spirit, and for conducting them safely through all the snares and dangers, the troubles and temptations of this world, to the secure possession of endless glory and happiness. Such shall be the employment of the blessed spirits above, and these are the chief ingredients of our happiness which the scripture mentions.

Again; This happiness shall be eternal. And though this be but a circumstance, and enters not into the nature of our happiness, yet it is so material a one, that all the felicities which heaven affords would be imperfect without it. It would strangely damp and allay all our joys, to think that they should sometime have an end. And the greater our happiness were, the greater trouble it would

would be to us to consider that it must have a period.

It would make a man sorrowful indeed to think of leaving such vast possessions. Indeed if the happiness of heaven were such as the joys of the world are, it were fit they should be as short; for after a little enjoyment it would cloy us, and we should soon grow weary of it. But being so excellent, it would scarce be a happiness if it were not eternal. It would imbitter the pleasures of heaven, as great as they are, to see an end of them, though it were at ever so great a distance; to consider that all this vast treasure of happiness would one day be exhausted, and that after so many years were past, we should be as poor and miserable again as we were once in this world. God hath so ordered things, that the vain and empty delights of this world should be temporary and transient, but that the great and substantial pleasures of the other world should be as lasting as they are excellent.

Lastly; This happiness is far above any thing that we can now conceive or imagine. It is so great, that it cannot now "enter into the heart of man." We cannot

cannot from the experience of any of those pleasures and delights which we have been acquainted with in this world, frame an equal idea and conception of it. So that when we come to heaven, we shall be ready to say of it as the Queen of Sheba did of Solomon's wisdom and prosperity, that "half of it hath not been told us;" that the felicities and glories of that state far exceed all the fame which we heard of them in this world. For who can say how great a good God is; and how happy he who is the fountain of happiness can make those souls that love him, and those whom he loves?

The second thing to be considered concerning our future happiness, is, the way and means whereby we may come to be made partakers of it. And that in short is by the constant and sincere endeavours of a holy life, through the mercies of God in our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ indeed is the Author of our salvation, but obedience is the condition of it; so the Apostle tells us, that Christ "is the Author of eternal salvation to them that obey him." It is "the grace of God" in the gospel "which brings" or
offers

offers this "salvation" to us; but then it is by the "denying of ungodliness and worldly lusts," and by "living soberly, "and righteously and godly in this present world," that we are "to wait for the blessed hope." Our Saviour promises this happiness to the "pure in heart," "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God;" and elsewhere the scripture excludes all others from any share or portion in this blessedness: so the Apostle assures us, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord."

Holiness is not only a condition, but a necessary qualification for the happiness of the next life. This is the force of St. John's reasoning, "We shall be like him, for we shall see him." To "see God" is to be happy, but unless we be like him we cannot see him. The sight and presence of God himself would be no happiness to that man who is not like God in the temper and disposition of his mind. And from hence the Apostle infers in the next verse, "Every man "that hath this hope in him purifieth "himself even as He is pure." So that if we live wicked lives, if we allow ourselves in the practice of any known sin,
we

we interrupt our hopes of heaven, and render ourselves unfit for eternal life.

This life is the time of preparation for our future state. Our souls will continue for ever what we make them in this world. Such a temper and disposition of mind as a man carries with him out of this life, he shall retain in the next. It is true indeed, heaven perfects those holy and virtuous dispositions which are begun here; but the other world alters no man as to his main estate, "he that is filthy will be filthy still," and "he that is unrighteous will be unrighteous still." If we do not in a good degree mortify our lusts and passions here, death will not kill them for us, but we shall carry them with us into the other world. And if God should admit us so qualified into the place of happiness, yet we should bring that along with us which would infallibly hinder us from being happy. To be happy, is to enjoy what we desire, and to live with those whom we love. But there is nothing in heaven suitable to the desires and appetites of a wicked man. All the joys of that place, and delights of that state, are purely spiritual, and are only to be relished by
those

those who have "purified themselves as God is pure." Heaven is too pure an air for corrupt souls to live and breathe in; and the whole employment and conversation of that place, as it would be unsuitable, so would it also be unacceptable to a sensual and vicious man.

From all this it appears how necessary it is for us to prepare ourselves for this blessed state, by the constant and sincere endeavours of a holy life, and by mortifying every lust and inordinate passion in our souls. For till this be done, we are not meet to be made partakers of the felicities of the other world.

The "having our conversation in heaven," implies likewise the effects which those considerations ought to have upon our hearts and lives. And they are such as these:

First, to convince us of the vanity of this world. God hath purposely made this world troublesome and uneasy to us, that there might be no sufficient temptation to reasonable and considerate men to take them off from the care and thought of their future happiness; that God and heaven might have no rival here below; that

that there might be nothing in this world that might pretend to our affection, or court us with any advantage in comparison of everlasting life and glory.

The hope of heaven should make us active and industrious to be as good, and to do as much good as we can in this life, that so we may be qualified and disposed for the happiness of the next. Men are usually very industrious for the things of this life, to be rich and great in this world: did we but value heaven half as much as it deserves, we should take infinitely more pains for that. As often as we consider the glories that are above, how does it accuse our sloth and condemn our folly that we are less concerned for our souls than most men are for their bodies, that we will not labour half so much for an eternal inheritance, as men ordinarily do for these corruptible things?

The consideration of heaven, and the firm persuasion of our future happiness, should actuate all the powers of our souls, and be continually inspiring us with new vigour in the ways of holiness and virtue. How should this thought swell our resolutions, and confirm our purposes of obedience, that if we have
our

our "fruit unto holiness," our "end will be everlasting life?"

It should also mitigate and lighten the evils and afflictions of this life. It is no great matter how rough the way be, provided we be sure that it leads to happiness. The incomparably greater good of the next life will to a wise and considerate man weigh down all the evils of this. And the scripture tells us that there is no comparison between them. "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." The evils of this life afflict men more or less, according as the soul is fortified with considerations proper to support us under them. When we consider that we have but a little while to stay here, that we are upon our journey travelling towards our heavenly country, where we shall meet with all the delights we can desire; it ought not to trouble us much to endure storms and foul ways, and to want many of those accommodations we might expect at home. This is the common fate of travellers, and we must take things as we find them, and not expect to have every thing just to our mind.

These

These difficulties and inconveniences will soon be over, and after a few days will be quite forgotten, and be to us as if they had never been. And when we are safely landed in our own country, with what pleasure shall we look back upon those rough and boisterous seas which we have escaped !

Again, this expectation should make us sincere in all our professions, words and actions. Did men firmly believe the rewards of another world their religion would not be only in shew and pretence, but in life and reality, no man would put on a form of godliness that were destitute of the power of it; we should do nothing for the opinion of others, but all with regard to God and our own consciences; and be as careful of our thoughts, and most retired actions, as if we were in an open theatre, and in the presence of the greatest assembly. For in the next life men shall not be rewarded for what they seemed to be, but for what they really were in this world. Therefore whatever we think, or speak, or do, we should always remember that the day of revelation is coming, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, when all disguises shall be laid aside, and every one's

one's mask shall be taken off, and all our actions and designs shall be brought upon the public stage, and exposed to the view of men and angels. "There is nothing now hidden which shall not then be revealed, nor secret which shall not then be made known."

Lastly, the hope of heaven should arm us against the fears of death. Death is terrible to nature, and the terror of it is infinitely increased by the fearful apprehensions of what may follow it. But the hope of a blessed immortality surprisngly relieves the fainting spirits of dying men, and are able to reconcile us to death, and in a great measure to take away the terror of it. I know that the thoughts of death are dismal even to good men, and we have never more need of comfort and encouragement than when we are conflicting with this last enemy: but there is no such comfortable consideration to a dying man as the hopes of a happy eternity. He that looks upon death only as a passage to glory, may welcome the messengers of it, as bringing him the best and most joyful news that ever came to him.

With

With what joy then should we think of those "great and glorious things which God hath prepared for them that love him; of that inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, which fadeth not away, reserved for us in the heavens!" How should we welcome the thoughts of that happy hour when we shall make our escape out of these prisons; when we shall be removed from all the troubles and temptations of a wicked and ill natured world; when we shall be past all storms, and secured from all further danger of shipwreck, and shall be safely landed in the regions of bliss and immortality!

O blessed time! "When all tears shall be wiped from our eyes, and death and sorrow shall be no more; when mortality shall be swallowed up of life," and we shall enter upon the possession of all that happiness and glory which God hath promised, and our faith hath believed, and our hopes have raised us to the expectation of; when we shall be eased of all our pains, and resolved of all our doubts, be purged from all our sins, freed from all our fears, and be happy beyond all our hopes; and have
all

all this happiness secured to us beyond the power of time and change: when we shall know God and other things without uncertainty, and love him and one another without measure; serve and praise him without weariness, and obey his will without reluctance; and shall still be more and more delighted in knowing, loving, praising, and obeying God to all eternity.

How should these thoughts affect our hearts, and what a mighty influence ought they to have upon our lives! The great disadvantage of the arguments brought from another world, is, that these things are at a great distance from us, and not sensible to us; and therefore are not likely to affect us so strongly, and to work so powerfully upon us. Now to make amends for this disadvantage, we should often revive these considerations upon our minds, and inculcate upon ourselves the reality and certainty of these things, together with the infinite weight and importance of them. We should reason thus with ourselves: If good men shall be so unspeakably happy, and consequently wicked men so extremely miserable in another world: if these things be true,

true, and will one day be found to be so, why should they not be to me as if they were already present? It is as certain that we shall die, as if an express messenger should come to every one of us from the other world and tell us so. Why should we not then always live as those that must die, and as those that hope to be happy after death? To have these apprehensions vigorous and lively upon our minds, is to “have our conversation
“in heaven, from whence also we look
“for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ,
“who shall change our vile body that it
“may be fashioned like unto his glorious
“body, according to the working of that
“mighty power whereby he is able even
“to subdue all things to himself.”

S E R-

S E R M O N II.

THE NATURE, REASONABLENESS,
AND ADVANTAGES OF PRAYER.

MATTHEW XXVI. 41.

Pray, that ye enter not into temptation.

WHEN we consider that our blessed Saviour has commanded us to pray, directed us in what manner we ought to pray, and set us an example of frequent prayer in his own practice; it

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must

must appear surprising, that any who pretend to be his followers, should indulge themselves in a determin'd contempt, or careless neglect, of this important duty. But surprising as it is, a little acquaintance with what passes in the world, puts it beyond all doubt, that the express precepts, and conspicuous example, of the great instructor of mankind, with regard to prayer, are treated slightly, nay even contemptuously, by some of those who call themselves his disciples. To what causes can such strange inconsistency betwixt the profession and practice of christians be ascribed? There may be many and various causes of it, according to the different turns of men's tempers, and pursuits in life. But as it would detain us too long, to enumerate them all; let it suffice at present, to take notice of that, which every one who has reflected on what passes in the world in his own time, or has looked into the history of former ages, must have observed; namely, that the best things may fall into disrepute, and consequently into disuse, for no other reason, but because they have been abused by the weak or the artful and designing part of mankind.

kind. Thus prayer, an excellent thing in itself, and a noble mean of improving our souls in every thing virtuous and praise-worthy, is sunk into contempt among one part of the world, from this accidental circumstance, that weak and well-meaning people have sometimes sullied its native beauty, by a mixture of low superstition; or, because worldly and designing men have perverted it to serve their wicked purposes.

In discoursing therefore on this subject, it is hoped it may not be unuseful, to endeavour, in the first place, to explain the nature of prayer; and to set it in its true light, by stripping it of all foreign and superfluous circumstances: and then to point out the advantages which arise from the sincere and steadfast practice of it.

Before we enter upon the consideration of these heads, it is proper to observe, that prayer is to be understood in a restrained sense in this discourse; as signifying chiefly that part of devotion commonly called petition; as distinguished from adoration and thanksgiving, which are frequently comprehended in the meaning of the word prayer.

In order to understand the nature of prayer, let us take notice that the inward acts of mind and heart exerted in it, from which the outward expressions should flow, and by which they should be animated, are principally these three following.

First; A lively and intimate persuasion that we are utterly insufficient for our own happiness; and that we depend entirely upon our Maker for all we possess here, or hope to enjoy hereafter. That we are in a dependent and indigent, a dark and uncertain state of being, is obvious on the first reflection: we discern, we feel in ourselves many marks of our dependence, our indigence, and ignorance. We find ourselves possessed of an existence which, if we only regard this present life, is confined within very narrow bounds, and extends only to a very short period. We see all creatures about us continually disappearing, after having acted their part but a few years on this stage: and we cannot avoid expecting the same fate ourselves; that we must soon withdraw into darkness, and make room for others: as we came
into

into being without our own choice or consent, at the pleasure of another; so we must depart out of this state of being, at the command of him who sent us into it: and even while we are allowed to continue here, we can neither procure for ourselves all the good things we want and desire, nor secure the possession of what we already enjoy: we feel manifold wants which we cannot supply: we groan under manifold imperfections and infirmities which we cannot remove; we are liable to innumerable dangers, many of which we do not foresee; and from others, even when we do see them approaching us, we cannot defend ourselves. We are conscious that we are not only in some instances weak and helpless; but very ignorant and uncertain of many things which nearly concern us. We know not what shall befall us in our passage thro' this life; nor at what time, in what manner, or circumstances, we shall make our exit from it into another: neither know we what our state or employment shall be in those other regions, into which we must

enter when we depart from this world. But the most lamentable and mortifying ignorance is still behind, namely, ignorance of our duty; or the great rule of life; ignorance of our true happiness, and the way that leads unto it. Tho' we have some general knowledge of our duty, from the light of reason and revelation; yet we find that we are not only in danger of erring, but frequently do err in applying general rules to particular instances of our conduct: daily experience convinces us, that a regard to worldly interests, and the strength of irregular appetites and passions, greatly darken our understandings, and occasion such false judgments concerning our behaviour, as necessarily leads us astray from the path of life: and surely, we have great reason to dread the consequences of a departure from the law of righteousness, under the government of the righteous judge of all the earth. In like manner, though we have some general and speculative knowledge concerning our true happiness, or chief good; yet our own experience, as well as observation of the world, may convince us, that our views of it are not so clear and striking

striking as, at all times, to prevent our pursuing false appearances of it: for alas! how frequently, how fatally are we disappointed; finding those things vain and unsatisfactory, in which our fond imagination had promised us happiness? We have no security in ourselves, that we shall not be guilty of the same transgressions of the law of virtue, and the same departures from the path of happiness, in the succeeding stages of our lives, than we have been, in the former ones. Now, every man who has seriously considered how wretched and helpless he is in himself, will find the necessity of flying out of himself, and of taking refuge in Him who made him, and upholds him in being. Which leads us to the

Second act of the soul exerted in prayer, namely, the lifting it up with the utmost ardor, to that greatest and best of beings, who brought us into life, and assigned us our station in it; entreating him to teach us what part we should act; to dispel all that darkness of understanding, which is so apt to mislead us from the right path; to forgive our sins and follies; to deliver us from

the fatal consequences of all our errors ; to preserve us from relapsing into them ; and to guide us safely to some proper mansions of rest, of light, and joy, beyond the grave. Every one who has imprinted on his mind a just sense of his ignorance, weakness, guilt, and danger, will find an inward necessity constraining him to have recourse in fervent prayer, to the great Author of his being, to conduct him safely through this stage of his existence ; to continue his providential care, in guiding him through the valley and shadow of death ; to settle him at last in some happier place of abode.

The third act of mind exerted in prayer, is a firm belief, and assured trust, in that God to whom we pray, and on whom we depend, that he will not only always do what is best, what tends to the greatest good of the whole system of intelligent beings ; but that he will, sooner or later, bring every one who sincerely seeks wisdom from him, to the possession of perfect virtue and everlasting happiness. Without this confidence in the infinite mercy of the great Father of all, there would be no foundation for prayer, nor encouragement

encouragement to the practice of it. When we enquire into the doctrine of divine revelation on this head, we find lively and unshaken acts of trust in God are by it represented as equally necessary and essential parts of prayer, with either of those already mentioned. "He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them who diligently seek him." "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask it of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering, for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed." There are numberless joyful declarations to the same purpose, in the books of the Old Testament: such as, "the Lord is nigh to all them that call upon him in truth: he will fulfil the desire of them that fear him; he also will hear their cry, and will save them." Our blessed Saviour hath expressly renewed and confirmed all those delightful promises. "Ask (says he,) and it shall be given; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that

“that asketh receiveth; and he that seek-
“eth findeth; and to him that knock-
“eth, it shall be opened: or, what man
“is there of you, whom if his son ask
“bread, will he give him a stone; or if
“he ask a fish, will he give him a ser-
“pent? if ye then being evil, know
“how to give good gifts unto your
“children, how much more shall your
“Father which is in heaven give good
“things to them who ask him?” And
these particular and positive declarations
of the will of God, are perfectly conso-
nant to the dictates of reason, by which
we are encouraged to hope that it al-
ways has been, is at present, and will
for ever be, the great, the standing, the
invariable law of the divine govern-
ment, to bestow wisdom, virtue, and
happiness, upon all those who ask them
with unfeigned sincerity of heart; even
tho’ they never heard of these comfor-
table promises on which our souls rest
securely; for it is very observable, that
these joyful assurances from the great
Father of all, that he will be found of
those who seek him, are express’d in such
general terms, as to exclude no one, of
whatever nation or country.

Before

Before we conclude this head of the discourse, let it be remarked, in order to prevent mistakes, that when it is said, "God will accomplish the desires of those who seek him;" this must always be understood of those who seek him with real sincerity and humility of soul, (virtues indispensably required in the gospel of Jesus Christ;) and who in a constant dependence on the divine assistance, exert their utmost endeavours to do whatever they can discern to be the will of God. Further, this doctrine of the certainty of obtaining our requests, must only be understood of what is necessary for enlightening and assisting us in the paths of virtue; and should by no means be extended to a thousand other things, which we may desire to know or possess, though they have no inseparable connection with our virtue or happiness. We may be apt to wish, with the greatest fondness, for uninterrupted health, ease, and pleasure, through our whole lives: but in these things, we must not hope to be gratified. We must learn to leave the all-wise disposer of every event, to lead us to happiness, in whatever path he pleases; whether it be the hard and rug-

ged one of adversity and affliction, or the more soft and smooth one of prosperity and joy. And lastly, let us carefully remember, that there is no ground to expect, that even our best and most pious desires are to be accomplished, all at once, and in an instant: we must wait with patience, till God shall finish his own work, by the various methods of his providence and grace: it is with the works of God within us, as with the works of nature without us: they are not completed all at once, and in an instant: they require time, and are brought to perfection by slow and insensible degrees. A child must have time to become a man. The tree which is but just now planted, must have time to grow up to its full maturity, and bring forth fruit. In like manner, the progress of the soul towards perfection in virtue, is by slow advances: bad habits must be gradually weakened and overcome; and good dispositions must be raised to their proper height, by an almost imperceptible increase. In a word, though we may be assured that our heavenly Father will bring us to perfection in glory and happiness, at last; yet it is
only

only by the slow and almost indiscernible steps of his Providence and grace, that we must be ripened for it.

Now, from this view of prayer, it appears, that there is a foundation laid for it, in the nature and circumstances of mankind, as dependent, ignorant, weak and guilty creatures; and in these manifestations their Creator hath given them of his glorious perfections, as employed for their safety and welfare. And from what has been said of the inward acts of mind and heart exerted in prayer, we may infer, that every well-disposed person (who will be at the pains to consider things impartially, and to distinguish betwixt pure prayer itself, and those odd and foolish things, which may sometimes mingle with it) must see, that it is a thing highly reasonable; that it is unavoidable to those who allow themselves to think seriously; that it is fit, and becoming, in the present state and circumstances of mankind; and that it has a natural tendency to beget and promote all those amiable and important dispositions of mind, which render men happy in themselves, useful in this world, or fit for another. And in the third place, this explanation

plication of the nature of prayer may furnish us with proper answers to the objections against it, commonly insisted on by those whose minds are under the power of prejudices. But this leads us

To consider, more particularly the advantages which arise from the sincere and stedfast performance of this important duty. And here,

In the first place, when we take the most general view of prayer, we cannot help discerning the usefulness and importance of it. When we consider that mankind, in their present state, are deeply immersed in the business or enjoyments of the world; that external objects are perpetually striking upon their senses, playing before their imaginations and making impressions upon their hearts; it evidently appears to be an unspeakable advantage to them, to have regular and stated seasons, of recalling their minds from the numberless avocations of a vain world, and fixing them upon God, and spiritual things. The surest method of counterworking the impressions made on the soul by that crowd of worldly thoughts which pass thro' it, is to banish them entirely for some time, and lay it open by prayer

prayer and contemplation, to the impressions of those heavenly and eternal objects, which by their greatness, importance, and excellence will engage and command attention. And indeed, without proper seasons allotted to retirement and devotion, and frequently recurring, we are in the greatest danger imaginable of being under the full and uncontrolled power of these vain and perishing objects which surround us in the world; and which are perpetually engaging the attention of our minds, and soliciting the love and affection of our hearts. Our Saviour, in the words of the text, takes notice of this, as one great advantage of prayer, that it is a preservative against the temptations of the world. "Pray, (says he,) that ye enter not into temptation." Now, prayer has a natural tendency, in a great variety of ways, to break the force of those temptations to which we are necessarily exposed in life. It keeps alive in our minds an habitual sense of our danger; disposes us to keep a watchful eye on those things from which our danger arises; and puts us in a proper posture for resistance and defence. It turns away our attention (as has just now been observed,)

ed,) from those objects which raise impure desires and guilty passions in our bosoms. It calls up such a lively sense of the divine presence, as must check the first rising of irregular inclinations; and fill us with dread and shame, of thinking, saying, or doing any thing unworthy of those who aim at the approbation and favour of the great Judge of all. It presents the divine perfections to our view, and inspires us with an abhorrence of every thing that would render us unlike to them. Whenever therefore we are assaulted with a temptation to gratify any impure and violent appetite, or passion, let us accustom ourselves to stop, till we have lifted up our hearts to God, in sincere and fervent prayer, that he may assist us in the conflict, and give us the victory; and we shall soon feel the violence of the temptation abated; that we are enabled to exert a hidden strength, and for the present, to obtain an intire mastery over it.

And as prayer fortifies us against temptations to sin: so it inspires us with the love, and animates us to the practice of every virtue. By offering up our most earnest desires to God, that he may more
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and more beautify our souls with all worthy and good dispositions, our love to them is increased; and we are the more disposed to employ every proper mean of establishing and strengthening them in our hearts. When we pray that the venerable image of our Maker may be stamped upon us, the divine perfections are necessarily presented to our view, and contemplation; our love and admiration of them is heightened, and we are fired with the noble ambition of drawing nearer and nearer to them, by greater degrees of resemblance. When we contemplate the deformity and misery of vice, under the actual sense of the presence of God, and intreat him to preserve us from it, we cannot but look upon it with the highest indignation, and form the most stedfast resolutions to abandon it. When we view the beauty of holiness, as our Creator's glory, and lift up our souls to him in ardent prayers, to adorn us with it, we must feel our hearts warmed with the love of it, and lay ourselves under the strongest vows of adhering uniformly and invariably to it, through the whole course of our lives. When we give full vent to the ardent breathings of our souls
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after the love of God, gratitude to him, and confidence in him; these pious affections are immediately awakened, and strengthened in some degree in our hearts: and when we indulge ourselves in frequent and ardent prayers for the prosperity and welfare of our fellow-creatures, this exercise of the kind and benevolent affections contributes greatly to enliven and invigorate them: moreover, those views in which prayer presents our brethren of mankind to our minds, tend greatly to soften our hearts and heighten our good-will and tenderness for them: when we consider them as a part of the same great family of God, with ourselves; as partakers of the same nature, as liable to all the same dangers and distresses, as groaning under the same darkness of understanding, disorder of heart, and violence of passion; it will be impossible for us not to love and pity them with the greatest tenderness, and pray with the utmost ardor, that they may be at last established in some better and happier state.

Further; Prayer puts us into the best frame and situation of mind for receiving the influences of heavenly light and grace.

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It promotes a certain softness and tenderness of heart, which renders the soul easily susceptible of the impressions of spiritual and divine objects: the soul, when duly softened and humbled by prayer, feels and sees in quite another manner than when it is hardened and puffed up with pride and vanity. A deep sense of our ignorance disposes us to attend to, and follow every ray of light, how small soever; whereas, pride of understanding shuts out the light, and turns away the attention from it. We should therefore consider prayer, and exercise ourselves in it, as the great means appointed by God for drawing down that wisdom from above, which is necessary to guide us to our higher country, and to settle us in eternal rest and happiness, in our Father's house.

True devotion likewise raises the human soul to an uncommon pitch of grandeur and elevation. The mind of man seems to adapt itself to the different nature of the objects with which it is conversant: it is contracted and debased, by being employed in little and low things; and it is proportionably enlarged and exalted by the contemplation of those things
which

which are great and sublime. The perfections of the Deity, his universal and eternal Providence, the excellence of virtue, and of those general laws of God which are the foundation and support of the order, the beauty, and happiness of his whole rational kingdom; the dignity and immortality of the human soul, whereby it is capable of vast and endless improvements; these are objects of such a striking and exalted nature, that they must ennoble and enlarge the mind employed in contemplating them. All worldly and transitory things must appear unworthy the love and pursuit of that soul, which is raised above all created things, and which aspires to, and pursues that happiness, which arises from the love, the resemblance, and enjoyment of the great Creator of all. There is no greatness of mind equal to that which springs from the divine ambition of aiming at a resemblance of God; and from the glorious hope of seeing him as he is, in some future period of existence. "Now are we the sons of God, but it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear,"

“pear, we shall be like him, for we
“shall see him as he is.

Lastly; True devotion gives a wonderful strength, and firmness, to the soul which is under the full power and influence of it. That man must adhere with inviolable constancy to whatever is great or good in life, who is animated with the hope of the divine approbation, and who relies with assured confidence, on the friendship, protection, and assistance of the great Ruler of all things. No difficulties, no dangers can terrify him, who has that great being on his side, who is alone the sovereign disposer of all events. No temptations of pleasure or profit can allure him who trusts in an almighty friend, who is able to make him happy in ten thousand methods beyond what he can conceive. Every worldly thing vanishes at the presence of him, “before whom the world is as nothing, less than nothing and vanity.” Even death itself is stript of all its terrors, to the pious man; when it is considered only as a removing that veil of flesh, which interposes betwixt him and the invisible world. Nay, death itself is desireable; as it discloses new scenes of wonder and delight;
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and admits the devout soul to the more immediate presence of its God, "where there are rivers of pleasures for evermore."

Since then prayer is a reasonable thing in itself; since there are so many, and so great advantages arising from the sincere and steadfast practice of it; it must be both our duty and our interest to continue instant in it. And that we may be animated with fervor and sincerity in the exercise of this part of our duty, let us frequently inculcate on ourselves, that we are weak, indigent, and ignorant creatures; and that we depend entirely on our Maker, for all we possess at present, or hope to enjoy hereafter. The first and most obvious reflection convinces us, that we are nothing of ourselves; but that it is by the power of God we have our existence: no man was ever so presumptuous and absurd, as to imagine or assert that he was author and original to himself; or that he felt a mighty power within, by which when brought into being, he could continue himself in it as long as he pleased. Every one acknowledges that he finds nothing in his own nature to warrant his subsistence in this world, for one moment; and far less

less to ensure it for ever in another. Nay, even supposing our existence continued to us by that all-mighty Being, who gave it, we are conscious that we cannot conduct ourselves surely to that state of perfection and happiness, which our natures are capable of, and for which they were designed. When we have viewed ourselves on all sides, we find we are in the most forlorn and helpless condition imaginable, without the friendship of a superior and almighty Being. In order to represent our deplorable state without a firm reliance on the all-sustaining and all-conducting Providence of our great Creator, let us suppose, that, in a morning, when we awake, we should find ourselves sailing along, with all our nearest relations and dearest friends, in a wide unconstant and seemingly boundless ocean; where we see storms and tempests gathering around us, hovering over, and very soon to break upon us; being utterly incapable ourselves to steer our vessel to any safe harbour, and without any hope of assistance, either from men or invisible powers; so that we could expect no relief, but must be in perpetual dread of being tossed up and down at the pleasure of winds and waves, till we should be
starved

starved to death, or, until our vessel split upon some unseen rock, and we should sink to the bottom. Would not our case be extremely lamentable? Yet this is but a faint image of our state here in this world, without an assured trust in the wisdom and goodness of an invisible and almighty friend, who will lead us safely thro' this dangerous voyage of human life, and land us at last on some peaceful shore.

We find ourselves placed here in a wide, and to our view a boundless world, and in the midst of an incomprehensible scheme of things: we know not whence we came, or whither we are going: we behold an eternity before us; but know not what shall befall us, while we continue here, at our departure hence, or in any period of that endless duration through which we may pass. We see other persons around us, of the same nature, and in the same circumstances with ourselves: they are as ignorant and as weak as we are; and can give us neither information nor assistance. When we reflect on what passes within our bosoms, we must own, that our inward tranquillity is frequently disturbed
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and interrupted. Sometimes, indeed, pleasing desires, joyful hopes, and delightful affections, enliven and gladden our hearts: but, at other times, vain desires, alarming fears, and guilty passions, disquiet and torment them. It is not in our power, to preserve uniformly the gentle emotions, and happy effects of the former; or to banish intirely the unquiet workings and baneful influences of the latter. When we look back on that part of our life which is already past, we cannot avoid being self-condemned for many instances of sin and folly; which sometimes awaken within us dire forebodings of a just punishment, awaiting us in some future period of our existence: and, when we look forward to that part of life which lies before us, we find reason to dread we shall be guilty of the same, or the like departures from the paths of wisdom and righteousness. Let any one retire from the noise and hurry of the world, and reflect seriously with himself upon his present state, as a state of trial, in which there is a certain path marked out to him by the great Author of his being; and that according as he walks in it, or departs from it, he

shall be happy or miserable in this, and in another life : and after he has imprinted on his mind a just and awful sense of this interesting and important truth, that his eternal happiness depends upon his behaviour ; let him further consider, that, through the weakness of his understanding, the strength of his passions, the fickleness of his best resolutions, and the numberless temptations of the world, he may be led astray from the path of life ; and he will find himself struck with such a sense of his danger, as will lead him to address his Maker in some such language as this :

O Father of lights, open mine eyes to see what my true happiness is ; point out the road clearly that leads unto it ; and never suffer me to depart from it. Send forth thy light and thy truth, let them lead me and bring me to that new heaven and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness : guide me with thy council while here, and afterwards receive me to glory !

S E R M O N III.

THE OBJECTIONS AGAINST PRAYER ANSWERED.

JOB XXI. 15.

*What profit should we have if we pray
unto him?*

THESE words will naturally lead us to examine the objections which have been usually urged against the duty of prayer. I shall therefore without farther preface, proceed to state them distinctly,

tinctly, and to offer such solutions of the several difficulties which have been raised on this subject as seem best adapted to satisfy the virtuous and pious mind.

First then, it is objected by some, that an omniscient God knows already what we want, before we ask it; and to what purpose do we ask those things which he already knows we stand in need of? The answer to this objection is evident: that the design of prayer is not to inform God of things which he did not know before, this is so far from being the design of it, that every one, even of the meanest capacity understands, that, when he addresses himself to his Maker, he ought to have it expressly in his consideration, that he to whom he prays, knows all his wants already, every circumstance of his condition, and every thought of his heart. The real design of prayer is, in the first place, to express, under a lively impression of the presence of God, the sense we have of our dependence upon him, of our manifold wants, and that he alone is able to supply them; and to make this sense more deep and affecting. Now, since it is a certain truth that we depend upon God; and have
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have numberless wants, the supplying of which we can expect from God alone; is it not highly reasonable and natural, that we should acknowledge this in his presence, and express to him our desires, and our dependence upon him? Do not such acknowledgments frequently made to him, naturally tend to strengthen our sense of this truth, and to make it more deeply affecting? Will any one venture to assert that this truth is not to be thus owned? Where is the man, who dares pretend to have credit and authority sufficient to controul this truth? Is not this a truth owned by angels in heaven, as well as men upon earth? Is not this a truth which shall be for ever owned by a dependent world? Besides, is not this a truth in which we are deeply interested? Is it not of the highest importance towards cultivating all other good dispositions, that we have most lively impressions of this truth, and use the most natural means of making them lively? As our dependence upon God is the primary, the most important of all relations, and the foundation of all others; the deepest sense and acknowledgment of it must be our first, our supreme,

and our most natural and most indispensable duty : our obligation to it can never be extinguished any other way than either by annihilating us, depriving us of our reason, or rendering us independent.

Is it not manifest that an intimate and habitual sense of our dependent state, has a mighty influence on all the duties which we owe to our creator, and to one another? The strength of our love, the warmth of our gratitude to our maker, and the stability of our confidence in him, must rise or fall in proportion as the persuasion of our dependence upon him is fainter or stronger. And as nothing has a more powerful tendency to inspire us with love, benignity, and compassion to our fellow-creatures, than considering them as the children of the same great Parent of all, equally depending upon him with ourselves, for all they enjoy here, or hope for hereafter ; so, nothing can more effectually check that pride, selfishness and vanity, which leads us to contemn and injure our brethren of mankind, than an habitual sense, that we are as really dependent creatures as they are ; that we are as insufficient for our own happiness

happiness as they are; and that he on whom we depend can soon raise them to our state, or thrust us down into theirs: why then, may not this truth, most certain in itself, and most important in its consequences, be owned in the most public and religious manner; in that manner, which naturally tends to make the deepest impressions of it upon our hearts? and that, certainly, is the owning it in direct addresses to God himself. Why should we not embrace every proper opportunity of acknowledging it, with all those affecting and solemn circumstances, which may contribute to imprint a deep and abiding conviction of it on our minds, and those of all around us? But to speak more directly to the head of petitioning; it is,

A further design of prayer, to express, under an actual sense of the presence of God, our earnest desires of having all those sentiments and pious dispositions, which it is proper for us to entertain and cultivate, considered as dependent, reasonable, social, and guilty creatures. If we feel earnest breathings after happiness, after the means that lead to it, and all those pure and worthy affections

which are the principal ingredients of it, we certainly ought to encourage and favour them. If then we find ardent desires arising within us, after the knowledge, the favour, the resemblance, and enjoyment of God, why may we not express them in that manner, and in those circumstances, which will contribute most to cultivate and increase such honourable and worthy motions of the rational soul? and, surely, the addressing such desires to God is the most effectual method of strengthening them. If we believe that God can accomplish these worthy desires, why may we not ask it of him? If we hope and trust in him that he will sooner or later accomplish them, why may we not declare our joyful expectations of being at last possessed of them? If we feel our souls ascending to God in love, joy, and praise, is it not reasonable, that we should indulge those delightful sentiments, and, by repeated acts, confirm and improve them?

If these inward emotions of heart are just and natural, if we cannot but approve them, if we judge them worthy of being cherished and strengthened; why may we not give full vent to them, in
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all proper methods of outward expression? And, if our own experience, and the testimony of the best of mankind inform us, that the yielding up our souls to the full influences of devout affections, and giving them full scope in voice and language, especially in addresses to God, are the most effectual methods of increasing that strength and fervour, and of spreading their happy effects through the whole of human life; it surely must be our truest wisdom to employ all these means of establishing and perfecting them.

It is further objected, that, since God is infinite in goodness, he is always disposed to bestow on his creatures whatever is proper for them; and, since he is infinite in wisdom, he will always chuse the fittest time, and best manner of bestowing it. To what purpose, then, do we entreat him to do, what he certainly will do, without any sollicitation or importunity? To this it may be answered; that, as it is not the design of prayer to give information to our Creator of things he was not acquainted with before; so, neither is it the design of it to move his affections, as good speakers

move the hearts of their hearers by the pathetic arts of oratory; nor to raise his pity, as beggars by their importunities and tears work upon the compassion of the by-standers. God is not subject to those sudden passions and emotions of mind which we feel; nor to any change of his measures and conduct, by their influence: he is not wrought upon and changed by our prayers; for, “with him there is no variableness, nor shadow of turning.” Prayer only works its effect upon us; as it contributes to change the temper of our minds; to beget or improve right dispositions in them: to lay them open to the impressions of spiritual objects, and thus qualify us for receiving the favour and approbation of our Maker, and all those assistances which he has promised to those who call upon him in sincerity and in truth: the efficacy of prayer does not lie in the mere asking; but in its being the means of producing that frame of mind, which qualifies us to receive. If it is still urged, Why do we ask, if God does not grant merely for the asking? To this I reply, that, if by asking be understood the uttering of words, and using a voice
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and language, in which all the symptoms of earnestness and importunity appear; this external part of asking, I own, serves no purpose, with respect to God; and the only use of it is to engage the attention, and raise the devotion of our own minds, or those of others. But, if by asking, be understood the inward desires and breathings of the soul after those heavenly dispositions, in which the perfection and happiness of our natures chiefly consist: in this sense of it, I assert, that these are the beginnings of virtue: these are the means of improving it, both in the nature of things, and by the positive appointment of God: these are inseparable from real virtue, as long as it is capable of improvement; which may be for ever, for any thing we know to the contrary; these desires, I say, are altogether unavoidable, and must arise in the breasts of all who have any degree of real goodness. Whoever has had the least glimpse of the beauty and excellence of real virtue, is not satisfied with such views of it as he has already attained; but pants after a clearer and stronger view of its everlasting worth and importance. Whoever has felt that pleasing

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serenity,

serenity, that lively joy, and delightful liberty, which arises from any considerable degree of superiority to worldly passions, longs with ardor, nay, almost with impatience, to obtain an entire conquest over them: and whoever has tasted the sublime, the divine pleasures of true devotion, breathes with the greatest fervour after the full and uninterrupted enjoyment of them. To those, then, who ask why we cherish the inward desires after the heavenly graces, and study to cultivate them by prayer, the answer is plain; that the doing so is the necessary consequence of real virtue, both in its first and feeblest, and in its highest and most perfect state, at least while in this world.

But, if it should be still urged, that, though we must have the desires, though we ought to entertain and cultivate them, yet this is no sufficient reason for our offering them up to God, and entreating him to accomplish them: why may we not desire all the divine virtues, and frequently repeat the desire in our minds with pleasure and with ardor, without directly addressing it to God, whose infinite goodness inclines him to fulfil it as soon

soon as his unerring wisdom sees fit? To this I answer, that it is impossible for the human mind to stop at the desire: it feels a powerful impulse, urging it forward to beg God to bestow what it wishes for with vehemence: and this very argument, which is urged against the lifting up holy desires to God; that he is infinite in goodness, and willing to gratify them; is a principal motive for offering them up; and makes it impossible for a well-disposed mind to abstain from it. Since then, there is a determination in our nature, leading us to pray; since there is a law of external revelation commanding us to pray; since our own minds, on the calmest reflection, approve of praying, as being an explicit and natural acknowledgment of our dependence on our Maker, and a declaration, that we will gratefully receive the blessings we pray for, as the free gifts of his bounty: and since prayer is a mean of enlivening and strengthening the best dispositions in our souls; we may conclude, that it is not only an innocent and harmless exercise; but, that it is our indispensable duty to be frequently employed in it.

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It is further urged, that there is no just ground of expecting any immediate light or aid from heaven, in consequence of the most sincere and fervent prayer: for after the most accurate inquiry that can be made into the workings of the human mind, there is nothing to be perceived, but what may be the natural effect of proper motives and arguments." In answer to this; let it be observed, that even supposing there is no good disposition awakened in the human soul, where the proper considerations and motives have not been laid before it: yet there may be good reasons for believing, that there is some secret and undiscernible aid of heaven concurring with those considerations and motives; displaying their whole importance and force to the mind; fixing the attention of it to consider them; and laying it open to feel their whole power and influence. This at least must be allowed, that the same motives, laid before the minds of different persons, do not produce the same effects: in two persons, who seem equally capable of discerning the strength and force of motives; who seem to have bestowed equal attention in weighing

weighing them; and whose passions seem to be equally capable of resisting; the effects they produce are widely different. Besides, it deserves our most attentive consideration, that there is no inseparable connection betwixt the clearest and justest views of the excellence and importance of moral and spiritual objects, and those feelings and affections of heart which correspond to them: a man may have the justest and sublimest ideas of all the human, social, and divine virtues, while he remains in a great measure, or altogether, without any feeling of them in his heart. There are many instances in the world, of men, who have formed the purest and most exalted conceptions of the divine perfections, who can speak of them with dignity, and are highly delighted with the theory and contemplation of them; and yet feel almost nothing of that true devotion of heart, which should be awakened by them. In like manner, a man may have his mind stored with the most exact and delightful speculations concerning the beauty and worth of temperance, integrity, sincerity, benevolence, friendship, humility, and all the human and social virtues;

tues; may be capable of speaking and writing about them, to admiration; while he still continues under the power of the lowest sensuality, and a selfish malignant disposition. On the other hand, it may be observed, that those who are less acquainted with the delightful theories of virtue and religion, who have not such exact and perfect notions of them, and who, from a necessary attention to other things, are seldom employed in thinking on them; yet are more uniformly governed in life, by the natural influence of the pious and virtuous dispositions themselves, than the greatest philosopher or divine, who spends his days in contemplating the ideas of them, and those views of things which should excite them. Now, as it is the good dispositions themselves, that constitute the soul and essence of virtue: as they only give the true dignity to our minds, and beauty to our lives; as they only can form the character which is worthy and acceptable in the sight of God; so, they are always represented in scripture, as the fruits and effects of the Holy Spirit. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness,

“cleanness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.” From these observations, it plainly appears, that after we have got the purest and clearest ideas of religion, and the fullest views of those motives which should engage us to the practice of it; there is still ground to pray, that God may bless us with those divine affections of heart, which are the only real ornaments to our souls, the only lasting foundations of their peace and happiness. Our ideas are but pictures and images of the things themselves: and as the picture of a feast cannot satisfy our hunger, nor the picture of a fire warm and enlighten us; so the finest ideas of virtue and religion cannot make us good and happy, without those dispositions of heart, which should be raised and kept alive by them.

The doctrine of the need of divine assistance in acquiring the habits of virtue hath been so deeply felt by the more considerate part of mankind, that it hath extorted a confession of it, even from those, whose speculative principles seemed to lead them to a denial of it. For we find that sect of the heathen philosophers, who laid the foundation of their system in the

the distinction betwixt things in our power, and out of our power ; (meaning by the former, our good dispositions, resolutions, and actions ; and by the latter, the external enjoyments of the world, which depend on a thousand accidents, over which we have no command ;) even they I say, in opposition to their favourite distinction, inculcated the usefulness and importance of prayer.

However, those who will not allow any immediate influence of the Deity upon the human mind, but ascribe every thing there to the natural force of arguments and motives ; ought to consider, that it is only going one step farther, and they come to God, and must own him as the original Author of all. It is God who has made the mind of man capable of perceiving motives, and of being wrought upon by them : it is God, who in the course of his Providence, has presented such a train of motives to any one's mind, as has engaged him to practise all the virtues of a holy life : to God, therefore, the praise of it is to be given. And there still remains abundant reason to pray to him, that he may, in the unsearchable wisdom and goodness of his Providence,

Providence, continue to present such views of things to the mind, as may determine it always to choose the virtuous and worthy part.

Farther; Some may possibly alledge that they have no need of prayer, and say, What should I pray for? Shall I pray that God may enlighten my mind with the knowledge of my duty, and make me perceive the excellence and importance of piety, sincerity, truth, integrity, charity, and all those virtues which dignify the souls of men, and beautify their lives and manners? I know all these things already, and conduct my life by them.

How much is it to be wished, that every one who thinks or speaks in this manner, would seriously ask himself, Have I already attained as clear and distinct views of the worth and importance of all the heavenly virtues, as are attainable by mankind? Have they as sovereign and commanding an influence over my heart and life, as ever they had over any of the sons of men? Am I sure there is nothing farther to be seen, nothing higher to be felt? What if human nature is capable of stronger and
brighter

brighter views of the worth and majesty of the great virtues of the spiritual life, than I have yet obtained? Nay, may I not suppose that many of the children of men have actually attained them, and conducted their lives more unerringly under the power and influence of them? Have I any ambition remaining? any thing of that divine ambition of aiming at a transcendancy in what is great and good, in what is the sole glory of a reasonable being? Shall I not then aspire after the highest sense, and the strongest impression of them, that my nature is capable of? Is there a great Father of lights, the enlightener of all minds, the everlasting lover and friend of truth and righteousness? Has he declared that he is ready and willing to enlighten those who ask wisdom from him? Has he assured us, that there is a dispensation of grace and light carrying on in the world, under his Son Jesus Christ, by which those blessings are perpetually imparted to all who sincerely ask them? Has he already enlightened, in a superior manner, those souls which lay themselves open to his influence? And, shall I refuse to ask his heavenly wisdom, and live

live contented with a smaller portion of it, when a greater may be obtained? Surely no true lover of virtue, no one who has any real greatness of mind, can bear the thought.

May we not further enquire of those who have such complacency, and satisfaction in their own characters and conduct; do you find nothing in the present temper and disposition of your mind, which you have reason to complain of, and which you desire to have rectified? Are there no imperfections to be corrected, no virtuous affections to be refined, confirmed, strengthened, and perfected? Are you already possessed of that degree of love to God, and true virtue, which pervades the whole soul, controuls the power of all the inferior passions, establishes a perpetual serenity within, and animates you with the utmost joy and alacrity, in practising all the virtues of a worthy life? If ye imagine ye are already raised to the utmost summit of perfection; we may safely venture to assert, that ye are mistaken; and that self-love has blinded your eyes, and made you pass too favourable a sentence upon yourselves. This fond imagination, that ye
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are already perfect, is almost a demonstration, that ye are yet at a very great distance from it: ye have certainly fixed too low a standard of religion: your intellectual eye is not quick and piercing enough, to discern the idea of perfection set before you in the law of God, which ye ought perpetually to have in your view, and to be aspiring after, with the utmost ardor. There are but few to be found, who have attained to the justest and highest taste of the true sublime in heart and life: whoever has had a clear and distinct view of it, will not flatter himself that he has reached it: nay, he will be fully sensible, that he has not yet approached near it: and whoever fondly imagines that he is come up to it, has not distinctly perceived it. That man must have a low understanding, and a vain heart, who is thus satisfied with himself; who fancies he has attained to the truly great and perfect in temper and conduct: and whoever is thus easily satisfied with himself, is commonly the only person who is so: or at least, the number of those will be few, who pass the same judgment on him, that he does on himself. The higher any one advances in religion,

ligion, his views are proportionably opened and enlarged. That moment the virtuous man has gained the victory over some bad passion he has been long struggling with, he sees some other one not quite subdued within him; and that moment he reaches to some certain pitch of virtue he had in his view, he discerns some higher pitch of it, at a great distance from him: in this, he resembles a traveller in a large champaign country; who, this hour, sees nothing beyond a small eminence, which terminates his view at a distance; the top of which he no sooner gains, than a new extent of country fills his eye, equal to that he has already passed. Since then, there is still something yet unattained in the spiritual life, can we restrain ourselves from praying that the God of grace, the author of every good and perfect gift, would enlighten our eyes to discern it, and inspire us with the divine ambition of aiming and endeavouring to obtain it? Is it not a joyful, nay, a triumphant consideration, that, by the light and assistance of the Holy Spirit of God, we may travel on, from perfection to perfection, and approach nearer and nearer to our
Maker,

Maker, by higher degrees of resemblance?

It is moreover objected, that those who seem to delight in prayer, do not appear to be better, happier, or more successful than those who neglect or contemn it. Where do we find God interposing for the prosperity of the pious, or where are these happy effects of devotion we are taught to expect? In answer to this, it may be observed, that there are different sorts of persons, who pray from very different views and intentions: some pray with no other nor higher view, than that they may gain a character as religious; which may be of use to them in the prosecution of some worldly design. Others use prayer as a kind of charm, to render them acceptable to God, or as an atonement and compensation to him, for those lusts of their hearts, which they are unwilling to mortify, and those iniquities of their lives, which they still continue to commit. Now both these sorts of praying people are to be thrown out of the question: and it is to be confined to those who pray, with simplicity and sincerity of heart; who have no other aim in praying, but that they may become better men,

men, that they may know the will of God more clearly, and may obey it with more constancy and alacrity, and who trust in God, that he "will be to them
"a sun and shield, and will give them
"grace and glory, and withhold no good
"thing from them, because they walk
"uprightly." If it be asked, what the better are these persons for their habitual course of prayer, and other acts of devotion? The answer is plain, that though they are not, perhaps distinguished by outward prosperity, yet they are rewarded with inward enjoyments of a higher and nobler kind. What though God has not bestowed houses, lands, riches, pleasures, honour, strength, or beauty, upon the pious man? these are only outward good things, incapable of giving true happiness to the possessors of them. But if he has given him greater blessings, wisdom, virtue, truth, integrity, temperance, humility, meekness, contentment, with all that inward peace, joy, confidence in himself, and hope of immortality which accompanies them; these are the true riches, the real treasures of the immortal soul: these are such treasures, as calamity, dan-

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ger, death, can never rob it of. It is true, these inward pleasures, these mental possessions are not discerned by spectators: but those who feel and enjoy them, cannot doubt of their superior worth and excellence. As it is well known, that many of those who put on an air of happiness, and whose outward splendor and flourishing circumstances create admiration and envy in ignorant beholders, carry about with them secret pains and inward stings, which greatly diminish, if not entirely destroy, their apparent happiness and contentment; so it is as certain, that the sincere worshippers of God, even when in the lowest state, and most afflicted circumstances, enjoy many silent pleasures, and secret consolations, which give them greater happiness, than worldly men ever taste amidst their greatest gaiety and abundance. He who is conscious that he possesses, in the main, that temper and disposition of mind which is acceptable to God, and who maintains an assured trust and confidence in the mercy and goodness of his Creator, enjoys an inward rest and composure of mind, which cannot be described. It is called, in holy scripture,
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“the peace of God that passeth all understanding.” It is an inward calmness and tranquillity, like to that of the highest heavens. He that enjoys it, is easy within himself, and pleasing to those around him. He is free from those inward disturbances and anxieties which disquiet the souls of other men. His conversation is pleasant, and his tranquillity appears in the chearful air of his countenance, though silent: his mind is open to taste, with full relish, all those good things which Providence has afforded for sweetening the journey of human life. But why do I call this happy state of mind, tranquillity only! it is far beyond mere calmness or tranquillity. There may be a perfect tranquillity and calmness in the air, though the day be overcast with thick mists and clouds. The state of the pious man’s mind is like a calm and serene day, enlightened and enlivened with the brightest sunshine. The truly devout man is not barely content with his lot, acting the part assigned him, however low it may be, to the best of his power: his soul rises up above contentment, to joyful thankfulness and praise. He rejoices in that existence, in-

to which he has lately entered, and in that rank of creatures to which he is advanced. When he considers that he is admitted to be a spectator of all the glorious works of nature around him, and that he is not only made capable of contemplating the beauty and order, the grandeur and magnificence of them; but of adoring, praising, resembling, and enjoying their great Creator and sustainer, he is transported with wonder, gratitude and praise. If these are my enjoyments (says he to himself) in this first stage of my existence, when my faculties are only beginning to open and unfold themselves; what new scenes, what nobler and more magnificent entertainments may I expect shall be presented to my view, while my faculties are improving and enlarging through millions of ages? What divine, what inconceivable joys, must break in upon me, if I should be admitted to survey all the bright and illustrious scenes of Providence, in many other parts of God's great dominions, and through all the successive periods of his righteous government? But what must my state be, when I shall see my Maker himself, "not darkly as through

through a glass, but face to face?" Here language, imagination fail me. Sure I am, it must be something that will be a fountain of unspeakable delight and everlasting rapture. "Eye hath not seen, "ear hath not heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive "those great things God hath laid up in "store for those that love him."

The last objection I shall take notice of, is this, that prayer can be of no importance; for since all things are already fixed by an unalterable decree of God, all those whom he has determined to be good and happy, shall certainly be so, whether they pray or not. In answer to this, let it be observed, that none ever maintained that God hath determined events to happen without any means. Now we have shewn that prayers are the proper means of obtaining spiritual blessings; and therefore, if we desire these spiritual blessings absolutely necessary to our happiness, (and which are not ordinarily appointed but to such as are thus properly prepared to receive and improve them) we should certainly incline to the use of all the necessary means to prepare ourselves for receiving them. Does any

ever pretend to reason thus ; if it be decreed that I shall be wise and learned, I shall undoubtedly become so, though I shall never converse, read, think, or exercise my understanding in any way ? Did ever any one seriously expect he should arrive at knowledge and wisdom by the mere force of an eternal decree, while he rejected all the means of attaining it ? Did ever the husbandman sit down and reason thus with himself ; if it be determined in the eternal decree of God, that I shall have a plentiful crop, I shall certainly reap it in the harvest, though I neither manure nor sow my field in the seed-time ? Now, so far as prayer is the mean of rendering us virtuous and happy, it is as absurd to expect we shall arrive at virtue and happiness without it, as it would be for the husbandman to hope he shall have his usual crop, though he bestow none of his usual labour and industry.

In fine, to this and every other objection against prayer, it may be replied, that after all that mankind can do, to reason themselves into a persuasion of the uselessness and absurdity of devotion, there is still something within them, too strong, too mighty,

mighty, for all their pretended demonstrations to conquer. The foundation for devotion is laid so deep in the human mind, that the utmost art and laboured endeavours of a whole life cannot erase it. There are certain circumstances and situations of affairs, in which nature will break forth, and shew its force to be superior to all artificial reasonings: there are I say, such circumstances in the course of almost every one's life, as will oblige the most hardened, obdurate neglecter or contemner of prayer, to lift up his soul to God with the utmost fervor. There are many such circumstances; but as it would take up too much time to describe them all, we shall only mention a few of them. When one is reduced to the utmost extremity of distress, under the pressure of some great affliction, when relations, friends, and others, stand around, but cannot give any relief, or administer any consolation; where is the man to be found, whose speculative opinions can then maintain their power over him; and restrain him from looking up unto God, and imploring aid and relief from him? In all cases too, of sudden extreme danger, do not we see how naturally men

fly to God, and invoke him with the utmost fervency, to help and deliver them? In like manner, when the poor, the weak the friendless man, is sorely wronged, and grievously oppressed by the great and powerful ones of the earth, and sees no possible way of redress from men; does he not call upon the great judge of all, to protect the injured, and plead his righteous cause? Again, when grievous crimes are laid to an honest man's charge, of which he is entirely innocent, especially when accompanied with such circumstances of probability, as that his friends, and those who are inclined to judge most favourably of him, cannot help suspecting that he is guilty; does he not then naturally appeal to the all-seeing and un-erring judge, and entreat him to vindicate his innocence, and clear his good name? These things are felt in mankind, by a sudden impulse of nature, without any deliberate reflection. Besides these instances, we may take notice of the two following: first, when any one is about to leave the world, and bid an everlasting farewell to all the enjoyments of it; when all hope of restoration to health, or even of prolonging
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life in a lingering disease, is taken away; is there any one who can then abstain from praying, that the great and good Being, who brought him into the world and led him through all the different stages of life, may continue his providential care, conduct him safely into the untried world of spirits, and be his guide through all the periods of his existence? And secondly, when any one stands by, and sees the expiring agonies of his dearest friend, for whom he felt the warmest love, and highest esteem; in whom he reposed an unreserved confidence; when he sees that all those talents, virtues and excellencies, which delighted his soul, are soon to cease, as to this world; can he help wishing and praying, with the utmost ardor, that such a soul, with all its virtues and accomplishments, may survive the dissolution of his mortal body, and that he may enjoy his delightful society in another and better situation of things, where there shall be no danger of death and separation any more?

But why do I insist on these particularly alarming circumstances, as the only proofs that mankind are determined, by the very frame of their nature, to have recourse

to Almighty God? For as soon as the faculties of the reasonable soul begin to open and unfold, it appears to be in a posture (I had almost said, in an act,) of devotion. Do not we see all mankind breathing after knowledge and happiness? Do not they all pursue truth and happiness, however far mistaken they may be, as to the kind of it? This ardent desire in the human soul, is so natural, so essential to it, that perhaps, there cannot be a juster, or better definition given of it, than that it is, a rational being panting for knowledge and happiness. It must be owned, that these breathings of the soul after truth and felicity are not directed immediately to God, nor explicitly expressed in words: and yet as there is no notion or conclusion of reason more natural, or obvious to the soul, than its dependence on God, and that he is the sovereign dispenser of its lot, the source from which all its excellency or happiness must flow; prayers are its most natural exercise, and even these instinctive desires may justly be called natural prayers. They discover a plain tendency of the soul towards God, the eternal fountain of light and happiness:

happiness: they are sure indications, that there is some idea of truth and happiness inseparable from the human mind; and that there is a natural instinct in it, which leads all men to seek after and pursue some species or other of good, and even to implore it from God.

From all these observations and reasonings, it is hoped we may conclude, that the neglecting or contemning of prayer, must be owing to prejudices, cherished and fortified with art and care; and not to any dictate of reason, or impartial inquiry into the state and tendency of the several workings of the human mind: and that none can have sufficient reason to adopt the language of the text, "What profit shall we have if we pray unto him?"

Let us then "continue instant in prayer, and watch thereunto with all perseverance."

It is a well settled principle of law, that the courts of this State have no jurisdiction to interfere with the private property of individuals, or to interfere with the rights of individuals, except in cases where the law has been violated, and where the courts are authorized by the Constitution to do so. In such cases, the courts have the power to issue writs of habeas corpus, and to grant other relief, as the law may require. The power of the courts to issue writs of habeas corpus, is a power which is derived from the Constitution, and is not a power which is conferred upon the courts by the Legislature. The power of the courts to grant other relief, such as injunctions, is a power which is conferred upon the courts by the Legislature. The power of the courts to issue writs of habeas corpus, is a power which is derived from the Constitution, and is not a power which is conferred upon the courts by the Legislature. The power of the courts to grant other relief, such as injunctions, is a power which is conferred upon the courts by the Legislature.

The power of the courts to issue writs of habeas corpus, is a power which is derived from the Constitution, and is not a power which is conferred upon the courts by the Legislature. The power of the courts to grant other relief, such as injunctions, is a power which is conferred upon the courts by the Legislature.

S E R M O N IV.

THE CONDITION OF THE WICKED
NOT TO BE ENVIED.

PSALM LXXIII. 3.

*For I was envious at the foolish, when I
saw the prosperity of the wicked.*

IT appears from this psalm, that the author of it had been perplexed, with what has in all ages been a common and popular objection against the providence of God, the prosperity of wicked men, and

and the afflicted condition of the righteous in this world. This he represents in strong and lively colours, describing the vicious man in the most affluent circumstances, while men of the strictest integrity are oppressed with various calamities: and his perplexity on this account appears to have been by no means wholly destitute of foundation: for though, generally speaking, the difference be not so great in fact, even in this life, in favour of vice and irreligion; though in most instances goodness does not suffer, neither is wickedness prosperous and triumphant; but good and evil are promiscuously and indifferently dispensed, and happen without any remarkable distinction, according to the natural tendency of things; yet, if there could be a case supposed, and consequently if a case might actually happen, in which wicked men might be gainers, and good men sufferers upon the whole, it must necessarily lead us to conclude, either that there was no Providence at all, or that the government of the world was weakly and unjustly administered. Whereas, on the contrary, if it appears, that virtue, though labour-
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ing under the utmost discouragements and difficulties, is not only more conducive to the good of mankind in general, but even to the happiness of particular persons, than vice in its most admired and envied circumstances, the conclusion of the Psalmist upon an impartial survey of the whole matter must pass for an undoubted truth, that notwithstanding this seeming irregularity, "God is good" to Israel, even to such as are of a clean "heart:" and besides this, we are hereby furnished with one of the strongest possible motives to relinquish our sinful courses, and apply ourselves to the practice of piety and virtue.

There are no arguments so likely to convince and prevail upon mankind, as those drawn from interest; and it must be beyond dispute, their interest to be virtuous, if it can be shewn, that virtue has a necessary tendency to promote the highest perfection and happiness of human nature, and vice to degrade it and make it miserable: if it can be shewn, that if a good and bad man are placed in equal circumstances, religion and virtue will contribute vastly more to the enjoyment of the one, than irreligion and wicked-

wickedness can to that of the other, even in the present life; that its pleasures are of a much nobler kind, more solid and durable; that it will give him a more exquisite and exalted taste of all the delights of prosperity, and administer more effectual consolation and support in times of affliction and calamity; and finally, that it affords him an encouraging prospect, beyond this vain, uncertain, and confused scene of things, while wicked men are distracted with dreadful apprehensions of future punishment. This alone must be sufficient to demonstrate wherein our true interest lies, and nothing farther can reasonably and fairly be demanded to prove the excellence and great advantages of a religious life, or the folly and mischievous consequences of a contrary course. Such light as this would infallibly direct our course in all common cases; and therefore it is acting in a perverse opposition to our own happiness, if it has not its effect in an affair, which, though it be less attended to by the generality of mankind, is in reality infinitely more important. But if it can be proved over and above this, that a good man under the greatest troubles, is in a much

much happier state upon the whole, than a sinner advanced to all the wealth, honour and sensual pleasure, which covetousness, ambition and luxury can prompt him to desire, or a lively imagination represent; the argument for virtue must then be irresistible, and men must surely be destitute of common reflection if they are not determined by it.

Let us then suppose a wicked man to be not only placed in such easy circumstances as exempt him from the cares of life, but to live in pomp and splendor; let him have all the honours that may gratify his ambition and vanity; let him possess wealth and power, and all the opportunities for worldly good that his heart can wish; let there be added to this a vigorous constitution, a settled state of health, together with secrecy and success in all his base and dishonourable undertakings, so that he can follow his inclinations without prejudice to his reputation or temporal interest; let him besides this be an atheist in principle, as well as a libertine in practice, and consequently be free from those uneasy reflections, which the belief of a Providence and a judgment to come might occasion. On
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the contrary, let the virtuous man labour under pain and sickness, destitute of the proper conveniences and accommodations of life; and besides this, let us suppose him to be persecuted for righteousness sake, to be the derision of his fellow-creatures, and to suffer the loss of liberty, and the worst trials upon the account of his religion.

Upon a view of the two cases as they have now been represented, men of little reflection may be apt to look upon the cause of virtue as defenceless; and pronounce the sinner to be the happier man. Yet sound reason will teach us otherwise, even upon this very unequal and aggravated representation of their respective circumstances.

Allowing the two cases as they have been above described, there is not even in this life so much difference in respect of real happiness and misery, as there may seem to be at first sight, between the wicked man in his elevation, and the good man in his lowest distress.

For we are to consider, first, that there is a great difference in the nature of their respective pleasures, the advantage of which is on the side of virtue.

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The pleasures of a good man are the exaltation and improvement of his noblest faculties, pleasures peculiar to rational beings, of the same kind with the happiness of God himself, the fountain of perfection and blessedness, and consequently solid and permanent: whereas the pleasures of sense are slight and superficial; we enjoy them in common with inferior creatures; they are not only empty and unsatisfying, because inadequate to the large desires of the human mind, but when intensely pursued are inconsistent with intellectual and moral pleasures, which are of vastly superior excellence. Again, the vicious advantages arising from wealth, honour, and worldly greatness, are chiefly imaginary, trifling, or despicable; and consequently not worthy to be compared with those sublime joys which spring from a true greatness of soul, and a hope of having the approbation of the all-wise Governor of the world. A man indeed whose taste is so depraved, may have all he desires, and no idea of happiness beyond what he enjoys as an animal being. But will any one pretend to say, that his false notion destroys the real difference of things, or
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that a life guided by reason and religion, which refine, enlarge and exalt the human mind, is not far more eligible than such mean enjoyments as are unsuitable to the faculties of the soul, and a reproach to its nature and dignity?

But further; Though it were possible for a wicked man to free himself from the belief of a wise and righteous Governor of the world, the inspector and judge of his actions; yet his reason, if it be not quite extinguished, may condemn his vicious pursuits as unbecoming his character, and a stain and blemish to human nature: for there are many, who seem to have discarded all thoughts of accountableness, and of future rewards and punishments, who cannot get rid of their natural sense of good and evil. This alone may represent the deformity of their vices, in so strong a manner, as to create much inward shame and confusion, and make them so often uneasy with themselves, as to imbitter their most admired and applauded pleasures: whereas, when the good man looks back upon the regularity of his past life, and views the sincerity of his intentions, and endeavours upon the whole to please God,

God, the reflection must afford rational satisfaction, because he has laboured to act as became a rational being, he has "set the Lord always before him," and confides in his care and goodness to support him now, and acknowledge him at last.

Lastly; Though a wicked man in the midst of sinful pomp and mirth, may have no fear of death upon account of its consequences; yet as it will put an end to all his power of gratifying himself, as it will rend him from this beloved world, where all his happiness centres, and can open to him no other scene, it must create great uneasiness of mind; and this uneasiness will be the stronger, the more numerous his enjoyments are. So that it is hardly possible for a sinner, who enjoys an uninterrupted course of prosperity, to attain a perfect indolence of mind and indifference about dying; but, on the contrary, it is highly probable, he will always be perplexed and distracted at the thought of it: or, if he could attain to such a stupid insensibility, which is the utmost he can hope for; what is this to the satisfaction that possesses the mind of the religious man, from
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the pleasing prospect of a glorious and happy immortality?

Which leads me to observe, that if the difference in this life were as great as it appears to be, the good man would notwithstanding upon the whole be infinitely wiser and happier than the sinner in the utmost height of his prosperity and grandeur. The possibility of a future state, where those who fear God shall be rewarded with eternal felicity, can never be disputed; for every modest man will allow thus much at least, that it is not contrary to reason, or the moral perfections of the Divine Being; and, even upon this low supposition, the folly of vice, though it be ever so triumphant in this world, will easily be made to appear: for it is certainly agreeable to reason, and a point of true wisdom, to part with some present advantages, and endure some hardships and inconveniences, for the sake of an infinitely greater possible good, and to avoid an infinitely greater possible evil; whereas the wicked man, for the sake of the low, unsatisfying and transitory pleasures that arise from the indulgence of irregular and vicious appetites, forfeits a possible title to the highest

highest happiness he is capable of through an eternal duration, and incurs a possibility of ruin under the most dreadful and tremendous circumstances that it can enter into the heart of man to conceive.

If we advance a step higher, and consider mankind as entertaining a general expectation of a future immortality, the folly of wickedness will be yet more conspicuous: because, as there is such an infinite disproportion between the concerns of this uncertain life, and those of eternity, it is rational for us to sacrifice all our interest here, to the prospect of a good so exceeding great and everlasting hereafter: there is no prudent man but would endeavour to secure this, whatever emolument at present he might surrender for it, or whatever evil he might expose himself to by the bargain. In this view then the wicked man appears to act the most foolish part, because he resolutely persists in a sinful course, the pleasures of which (if they may be so called) are empty and short-lived, when he does not know but he may, nay, when he is inclined to believe he shall, by this means forfeit an immortal.

mortal felicity, and expose himself to never-ending misery.

But if men profess to believe a future state of existence, wherein their lot shall be determined according to their present behaviour, then a course of wickedness and irreligion must be the height of extravagance. For who that deliberately considers this life as very precarious, and the possessions of it still more so than life itself; and further, that the scene which death shall open upon us will never close: who that duly weighs so serious a thought, can without a sort of distraction, take those measures which he is certain will render a future state miserable to him? Such is the conduct of every one who heaps up treasures, or wantonly gratifies any perverted taste in this life, and therefore "is not rich towards God."

But we ought to do the argument for religion so much justice as to observe, that the cases upon which the preceding part of the discourse has been formed, are but imaginary; they are so far from being general, that as we have reason to believe they never happened in any former age, so it is most probable they never will happen in future times. For
it

it appears in fact, that wicked men are liable to sickness, pain, disappointments, and all the common misfortunes of life as well as others, there being one uniform course of providence observed towards all mankind, without any frequent visible interruption. Nor is religion calculated to destroy, but rather to promote the true satisfaction of life. It denies us not the superfluities of it in any degree in which to a rational mind they can be desirable. The man who is governed by it can enjoy these things with a much higher relish, than he who is fordidly confined to and sunk in animal indulgences. His religion teaches him, that "the life of man consists not in the abundance of the things he possesses," it sets bounds to his desires, it hinders him from "placing his trust in uncertain riches," as his ultimate happiness, and consequently delivers him from many anxious and perplexing cares and fears. Whereas the cravings of a covetous, ungoverned appetite are insatiable and endless, and consequently extremely tormenting. Persons under such an influence pursue an imaginary good, and from the fatigue and dread which one

way or other attends, and follows unlawful gains, they truly find, as Solomon says "nothing but vanity and vexation" of spirit.

What has been said with regard to riches, is also true as to worldly honour; religion does not restrain men from endeavouring to obtain it by just and truly honourable methods; and it is the only thing in the world that can enable them to preserve under it an equal temper of mind, that is neither insolent in advancement, nor will be confounded and sink beneath itself in disgrace. But it may be questioned, whether this be indeed one of the advantages of human life, as it exposes men to such various temptations, and is so uncertain and dangerous. Or if it be an advantage, it can be but a small one, since it is chiefly so in opinion, it wears a gilded outside, which dazzles superficial minds, but which in itself conveys but little real satisfaction: whoever therefore for this relinquishes knowledge and virtue, must be an enemy to his own real interest; and the circumstances of that man must be much more desirable, who having a modest, humble mind, suits his desires to his condition,

dition, and readily sacrifices a fantastic good to the nobler delights which a course of virtue proposes and affords.

And finally, religion allows of sensitive pleasure, as far as the regular inclinations of nature require, and as is consistent with our own and others advantage. By controlling our appetites for the preservation of our health, and for the rectitude and peace of our minds, it conduces greatly to our benefit in this world.

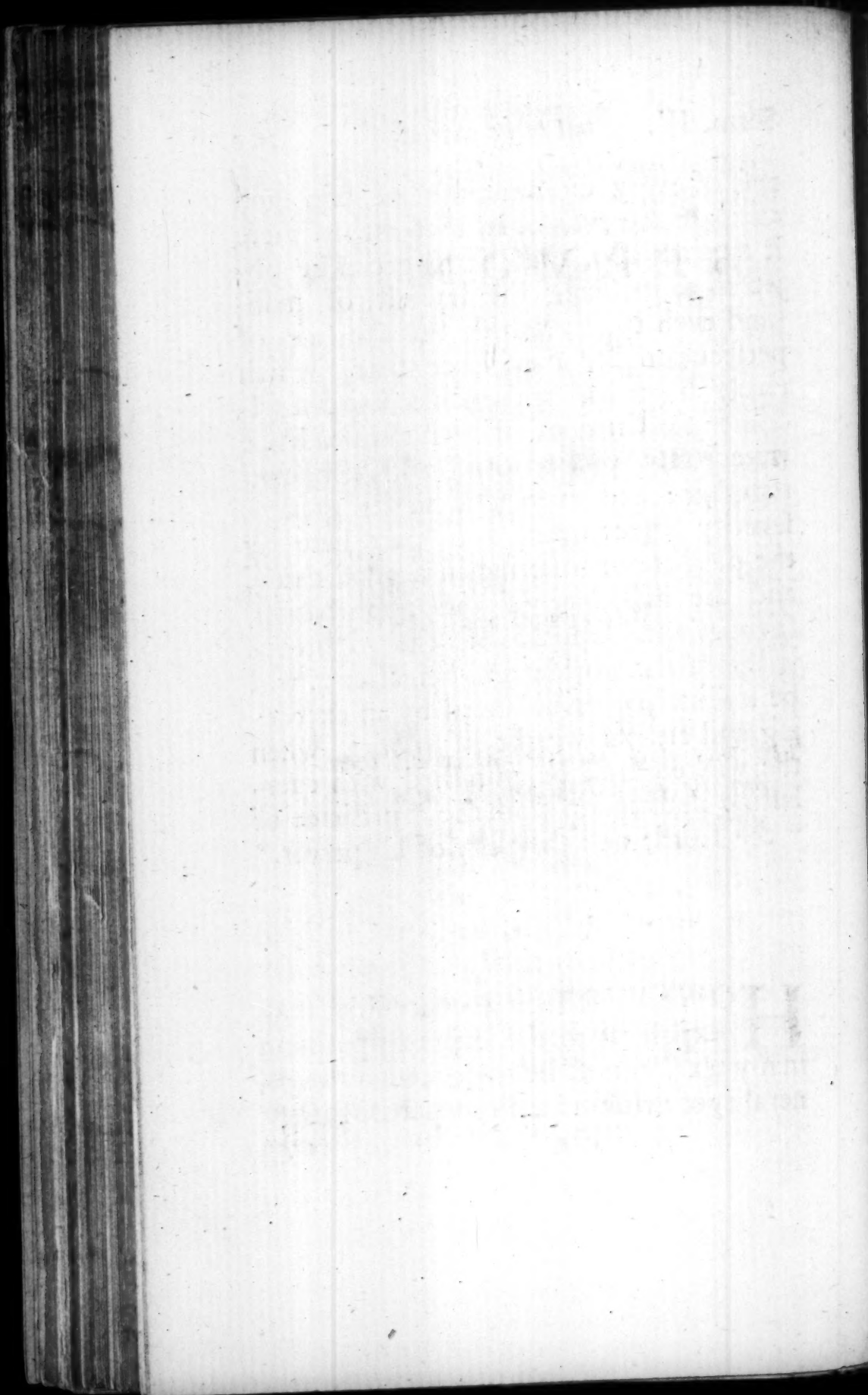
Indeed the usefulness of religion, and its admirable subserviency to the welfare of men, is seen in nothing more than in such restraints, by which it hinders our preferring the less, and secures our possession of the greater blessing; nay, by which it keeps us from doing ourselves a real mischief, and obliges us to pursue that which will render us as happy as this state of things will admit of.

Add to this, that it may be doubted, whether by confining ourselves within those bounds which virtue prescribes, we do not enjoy even sensual gratifications in greater perfection, than those who are immoderate in the use of them. For the senses are blunted by too much exercise,

the appetite is palled, and in consequence all that succeeds must be in proportion flat and insipid. But, however this be, the pleasure of commanding an irregular propensity, is greater than any that can arise from a compliance with it. Such a conquest is great and manly, and consequently the satisfaction that results from it, must have a solid foundation, and improve upon reflection: whereas forbidden enjoyments leave a sting behind, they will not bear a review, because they are the abuse of those faculties which our maker has given us. Besides this, it is very obvious, that by these means, persons often ruin their reputation, consume their substance, prejudice their constitutions, darken their understandings, and where there is a notion of a God and Providence, which very few, if any can get rid of, fill the mind with confusion and terror, especially in the times of affliction, and at the hour of death, when the future state opens upon them, and their doom will be decreed for ever.

So that it appears in general according to the natural course of things, that the practice of virtue has a much more probable tendency to improve the happiness

ness of every circumstance of life, and mitigate the evils of it, than that of vice: it appears also, that nothing can be objected to its being the interest of mankind even in this world, but the case of persecution for conscience sake, which rarely happens, and would happen seldom more than it does, if zeal and prudence were justly proportioned and tempered together: and even this in its greatest severity is recompensed in part here by the pleasure of suffering in a good cause, and the assurance of the approbation, favour and support of the righteous judge of the world; and hereafter it will be infinitely over-balanced by an exceeding and eternal weight of glory; when the wicked shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the “presence of the Lord, and the glory of his power.”



S E R M O N V.

THE WISDOM OF REGARDING COUNSEL.

PROVERBS xii. 15.

*The way of a fool is right in his own eyes :
but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is
wise.*

HOWEVER such a concession may
expose us to the severe imputation
in my text, it must be owned, that the ge-
nerality of mankind are very partial to their

own schemes, and immoderately addicted to their own ways of thinking and acting. However their judgments be formed, whether deliberately, or rashly; however their measures be concerted, whether wisely or weakly; they resolutely adhere to them, and persist in them at all adventures. Every man's way is, and must be, in some degree, acceptable to himself; otherwise he would never have chosen it. But nevertheless whoever is wise, will be apt to suspect and be diffident of himself; and upon that account be willing to "hearken unto counsel:" whereas the foolish man being, in proportion to his folly, full of himself, and swallowed up in conceit, will seldom take any counsel but his own; and for that very reason because it is his own. Hence it often happens, that in opposition to all the reasons and remonstrances that can be offered him, he continues immovable in his choice, and thereby exposes himself to many inconveniences that might easily have been avoided. Thus his interest falls a sacrifice to his vanity, and he never gains wisdom till he has dearly paid for it. Nothing will convince him that he needs other men's counsel, till he finds

finds himself bewildered in his own devices.

In treating of this subject, I shall first consider it in general, and secondly with a particular regard to our main concern. Considering it in general, the folly of rejecting counsel, and the wisdom of hearkening to it, may evidently be made appear on the following grounds.

First; The mind of man is not only finite, and limited, but of a short extent, and a narrow comprehension. When he has improved it as much as he can (which is seldom the case) still his views will be very imperfect, and his knowledge inconsiderable. When he has sought and searched as far as he is able, innumerable things will escape him; and he is sure to find himself frequently at a loss. Should we suppose all human knowledge put together; comparatively speaking, it would amount to very little. Like a great number of rivulets united in one stream, it would bear no proportion to the vast and boundless ocean of truth. How small a pittance then must that be which falls, or can fall, to any particular person's share? Whatever pains he has taken, whatever enquiries

he has made, in numberless cases and respects he finds himself in the dark; very often puzzled and perplexed, and wanting help on almost every occasion. Like a traveller in a strange road, he must either take directions, or frequently lose his way, and wander he knows not whither. Nothing is more absurd than to imagine that any man can be too wise to learn, or too knowing to need instruction. Nay whoever entertains such a thought in respect of himself, does thereby demonstrate his own folly, and prove himself egregiously ignorant. And this holds equally true in points of speculation, and matters of practice. As every man wants a communication of light for the improvement of his conceptions, so he no less needs counsel for the direction of his actions. Various cases are continually occurring, many exigencies must he meet with in life, wherein he must either take advice, or be a great sufferer. Nor is it any objection against the wisdom of Providence, that men are not always able to direct themselves in the execution of those affairs, and the discharge of those duties which are incumbent on' them. On the contrary, it
was

was most wisely ordained, that in this and many other instances, they should mutually depend on each others assistance. As they were intended for society, such a dependence was requisite to bind and cement it; to join their heads and hearts, and enable them more successfully to promote the great ends of life. But to return, since all mens minds are thus defective, and their knowledge short and scanty; since on many occasions they are unable to direct themselves, or remove those difficulties in which they are often engaged; it is manifestly great folly to put entire confidence in their own judgments, and lean solely "on their own understandings." On the other hand to "hearken unto counsel" is a disparagement to no man: so far from it, that it is an indication of wisdom, and the likeliest way to increase it. It is a natural remedy, and a proper supply, for human imperfection; a safe and profitable expedient; and the wisest men are ever most willing to make use of it.

But, the reasonableness of regarding counsel, and the folly of despising it, will more evidently appear, if we consider the diversity of men's talents

and opportunities. Let us suppose a man so far indulging his vanity, as to conclude himself possessed of as much knowledge, and as large abilities, as any person whatever. And to shorten the dispute, let this vain conclusion, this high demand be granted him: still it will be nothing to the purpose; nor will it justify that self-confidence, and neglect of counsel, which are condemned in my text. In some points, some parts of knowledge, he would nevertheless be excelled; admitting, in the main, that equality of understanding which he pretends to. For whatever mens capacities may be, most certain it is that there is great difference and variety among them; I mean not in degree, but in kind. Their talents, even when equally valuable and good, yet point different ways, and are suited to different objects and employments. One man's natural genius lies one way, and another's takes a different turn. And supposing them cultivated alike, the consequence must be, that each of them must excel and be superior to the other in that branch of skill for which nature has fitted him. What we read of supernatural gifts, the same holds

holds true of natural powers; that "they are divided to every man severally" as the donor pleases: and that purposely, without question, to answer better the various uses and occasions of life. Supposing then any man's capacity as good, in its kind, as he imagines it; yet surely he must allow that other men may have equal talents and abilities of other kinds. From whence it follows, that if not in all, yet in many cases, they must be able to judge better, and give better directions, than he can pretend to. No man had ever such an universal genius as to excel in every thing. And if any one can arrive at such an extravagant degree of vanity, as to fancy such a thing of himself, all that can be concluded from it is, that however he may flatter himself, he wants counsel more than any man living. But further, as mens talents are various, so their opportunities of improvement and experience are very different: not only such opportunities as arise from mens respective professions, wherein they are doubtless most capable of judging, and most fit to be consulted; but such as they accidentally meet with in the several paths and pursuits of life.

Every

Every man of thought and application must gain experience in those matters wherein he has been conversant; and the more experience he has, the fitter he must ordinarily be to direct those that want it. And want it every man must in many things. As no man has a universal understanding, so no man has, or can have, universal experience. Both the one and the other are unavoidably limited to a few particulars. The narrowness of our minds, and the shortness of our lives will seldom admit of any thing further. As then almost every man may be capable of giving advice in some points or other; so there is no man who is not often obliged to receive it, or to suffer through the want of it. Hence it comes to pass, that the lowest part of mankind have been sometimes qualified to inform the highest; that in some cases philosophers have been instructed by illiterate rustics, and even princes by peasants. Nor have the greatest men, on proper occasions, disdained to hear and follow the advice of the least. And indeed it is an argument of true greatness of mind, as well as good sense and judgment, so to do. For most certain it is, that the know-

knowledge of the wisest men may be and is often indebted to the experience of those who know the least. And if any man is so vain and so weak as to slight the judgment, and contemn the counsel of other men; if no "way is right in his eyes" but "his own;" he may enjoy his own esteem and good opinion as he can; but the wiser part of mankind will not fail to brand him as Solomon does in my text.

Again, the wisdom of hearkening unto counsel, and the folly of despising it, are further manifest from the following consideration. Let mens abilities be ever so great, and their knowledge ever so extensive; still they ought not, and without great danger and inconvenience cannot trust wholly and entirely to themselves. For those abilities and that knowledge easily may be, and often are, rendered useless by the prejudices and prepossessions of men's own minds. The best understandings are frequently biased, not to say blinded, by favourite opinions and darling inclinations. Nothing is more common than for men's appetites and affections to bribe their judgments, and seduce them into erroneous
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and absurd ways of thinking and acting. They are often entangled and set fast, not through the want of light and knowledge, not through any defect of their heads, but through the deceitfulness of their hearts. In many cases where they could easily direct other men, they suffer themselves to be misled; and are driven into the snare by strength of inclination, or the force of habit. The plainest points are often mistaken in the decision; the weakest designs are undertaken, and the silliest actions done, by men of superior understanding and distinguished capacity. If it be enquired how this comes to pass, the answer is, that their judgments are clouded by some strong prejudice, or corrupted by some powerful affection; insomuch that they can neither hear nor see any thing but what makes for one side of the question. And though the evidence on the other side be much stronger, and would appear so to them if they would let it; yet some way or other it is effectually stifled, and stands for nothing. In such a case as this what availeth any man's abilities? What signifies his capacity, while he thus plays tricks with his faculties, and will not use them

them fairly and honestly? Is it not plain that he wants counsel and admonition as much as if he were never so ignorant? And indeed he really is, on such occasions, as ignorant as a man can be; only with this difference, that his ignorance is not involuntary, but in a great measure wilful; not his misfortune, but his crime. Let mens eyes or understandings be ever so good, it is at any time in their power to make both useless by shutting them up against the light. While a man is resolved to wink, he must and will be as much in the dark as those that want sight. But this acquired darkness, this voluntary incapacity, as well as the want of counsel thereby occasioned, nowhere appear more frequently, or more remarkably, than in the transaction of our spiritual concerns, and what relates to the discharge of our duty: which is the

Second point that I proposed to consider. Here then the power of prejudice, and the bias of inclination, shew themselves in the highest degree. Though we want no knowledge, though our understandings be ever so well informed, we can find ways and means to render it
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ineffectual. We can, and too often do, withstand the clearest evidence, and shut our eyes against the plainest reasons in the world. And if our ears be shut too; if we will not "hearken to counsel," nor suffer ourselves to be advised; it is easy to see what is likely to be the consequence. Whenever we seriously reflect on it, we cannot but be astonished to think what pains men take, and what arts they use, to delude themselves and impose upon their own judgments; and that in affairs of the utmost consequence. "The way of a man," says our royal Author, "is "right in his own eyes, though the end "thereof be the ways of death." When we have wandered out of the road, and almost lost ourselves in bye-paths; we can make ourselves believe that we have continued all the while in the high-way to truth and happiness. So strong is this self-delusion, that it hides from us whatever we have no mind to see; and in the midst of guilt, and danger, soothes us into an opinion of our innocence and security. Very often we lay aside all thoughts of our duty, and keep it quite out of our minds: and when we do think of it, we contrive to think
just

just what we have a mind. In respect of what is past, we place our conduct in the best light, and represent our actions in the fairest colours. Our judgments are always favourable, and sometimes directly false; and as much as possible we teach our very consciences to flatter. We speak peace to ourselves, when there is no peace; and conclude ourselves in safety, when we are on the very brink of ruin. In respect of futurity, whatever may be dreadful or disagreeable, is carefully covered, and kept out of sight. On the contrary, we build fair hopes, and lay out fine prospects, in our own imaginations; and what is wanting in truth and probability, is made up with fallacy and fiction. In short, such is the "deceitfulness of sin," and so weakly are we guarded against its frauds; that nothing can be more foolish, nothing more fatal, than trusting wholly to ourselves, and rejecting the benefit of wise counsel and faithful admonition. If we refused other men's advice merely in order to follow the dictates of our reason; though this in many cases would still be folly, yet it would be moderate folly in comparison of what we are often guilty of.

of. We not only neglect other men's understandings, but frequently our own. Instead of listening to our reason, as we pretend ; we are often only consulting our inclinations, and taking counsel of our lusts and appetites. And without doubt miserable counsellors they are. What should we think of that man, who renouncing the protection of law and government, should commit himself to the custody of wild creatures, and beasts of prey ? Such, and more foolish is his conduct, who abandoning his reason, gives himself up to the guidance of his lusts and passions. For in truth the passions of men, when they have once broken loose from the restraints of reason and religion, and have gotten their full liberty, are more unruly and more mischievous than any brutal instincts whatever. So great need have we of the direction of our reason and understanding ; and indeed of all the reason that we can meet with either at home or abroad. We should carefully "incline our ear unto wisdom," wherever it is to be found. We should "seek her as silver," according to our wise Author's advice, "and search for her, as for hid treasures."

" She

“ She is a tree of life to them that lay
“ hold upon her ; and happy is every one
“ that retaineth her. Then shall he walk
“ in his way safely, and his foot shall not
“ stumble.”

But it is further to be observed, that as men's attachment to their own ways, and their aversion to counsel, are frequently owing to the prejudices and partialities of self-love, or the delusions of sinful lusts ; so they are often occasioned by thoughtlessness, negligence, and inconsideration. However apt they may be to mistake or misrepresent their duty ; most certain it is that they are still more prone to forget it, as well as those important truths that are connected with it. Though they very well know what obligations they are under, and sufficiently understand where their true interest lies ; yet while these things are unconsidered and unthought of, it is much the same as if they were unknown. If men will not take care to keep them in mind, but rather endeavour to keep them out ; how can it be expected that they should have any influence, or take any effect ? Supposing therefore that they did not want instruction and counsel, yet certainly

tainly they stand in great need of faithful monitors; to bring these neglected truths to their remembrance; to open their eyes, and recall their thoughts; and, if possible, to fix them on those weighty concerns which they are so apt and so inclinable to forget. To admonish and exhort them "daily, lest they be hardened," or stupified, "through the deceitfulness of sin." Such help as this is universally wanted; nor can it without extreme folly and desperate obstinacy be rejected.

Especially if it be considered, how much depends on the care we take of our conduct, and the discharge of duty. This is matter not only of great moment, but really of infinite consequence. When we fail of success in our temporal affairs, at most we can only sustain a temporal damage, which perhaps may be repaired; and if it cannot, yet it may be borne with patience, and even contentment. For most of the things of this world are of such a nature, that we may either do with them, or without them. And moreover, this life itself is but a span, and will soon be ended. But if we finally miscarry in our spiritual concerns;

concerns; the loss is irreparable, unspeakable, and eternal. If we forfeit the favour of God, and that great and endless happiness which belongs to it; what can there be left to relieve or comfort us? If we lose that mighty good, that inestimable blessing; all our hopes are struck dead at once, and our expectations cut off for ever; we are utterly ruined beyond the reach of remedy; beyond the help of time, and all the powers of patience. Can we then be too careful, too solicitous, about this important affair, this everlasting concern? Can we reject any means, or neglect any opportunities of securing it? Ought we not rather to accept willingly, and even seek diligently whatever may assist us therein, or contribute to our success? Does not that counsel deserve to be hearkened to, which warns us to "flee from the wrath to come," and not to "neglect so great," so eternal a "salvation;" which is meant to withdraw our affections from this vain transitory world, and fix them on the joys and glories of a blessed immortality? In short, if there be any wisdom in refusing and despising admonitions of this nature; it will be impossible

impossible to prove that there is any such thing as folly, or even to understand what it means.

But after all; however lightly we may esteem the helps and directions of human wisdom, yet surely the highest regard and reverence are due to the divine. Whatever we may think of the advices of meer men; yet this can be no reason for neglecting that which comes from God? If we will not mind fallible counsellors; yet shall we give no heed to prophets and apostles? Shall we not hearken to the Son of God, the Saviour of the world; who came into it on purpose to instruct and direct us, and guide us in the way to everlasting salvation? Shall we not attend, devoutly and diligently attend, to the counsels of our heavenly Father, and the admonitions of the Most High? Can we have more regard to what is "right in our own eyes," than to what is right in his? Dare we not trust omniscience? Is it possible for us to imagine that infinite wisdom cannot direct us better than we can do ourselves? But I shall not expostulate any further. The thing itself speaks so plain, that nothing can make it plainer. I shall therefore

fore conclude with the words of wisdom,
or rather the God of wisdom, delivered
to us by our royal Author. "Because
"I have called, and ye refused; I have
"stretched out my hand, and no man
"regarded; but ye have set at nought
"my counsel, and despised all my re-
"proof: I also will laugh at your cala-
"mity, I will mock when your fear
"cometh: when your fear cometh as de-
"solation, and your destruction as a
"whirlwind; when distress and anguish
"cometh upon you, then shall they call
"upon me, but I will not answer; they
"shall seek me early, but they shall not
"find me. For that they hated know-
"ledge, and did not choose the fear of
"the Lord; therefore shall they eat of
"the fruit of their own way, and be fil-
"led with their own devices. But who-
"so hearkeneth unto me, shall dwell safe-
"ly, and shall be quiet from fear of
"evil."

The first of these is the fact that the
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S E R M O N VI.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE DUTIES OF MORALITY.

MATTHEW XXIII. 23.

Wo unto you scribes and pharisees, hypocrites; for ye pay tithe of mint, and anise, and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.

IN this passage our Saviour censures the scribes and pharisees for their vile hypocrisy, in expressing the greatest zeal for the

ritual observances of their law, while they shamefully neglected and made no account of the principal and most important duties of it; in being superstitiously nice and scrupulous about the tithing of some inconsiderable herbs, while they had no regard to justice and equity, mercy and charity, faithfulness and truth: whereas, on the other hand, though those smaller matters which they were so zealous about, were not altogether to be disregarded, yet these great and important duties ought certainly to have been the objects of their first and chief care. The warmth and indignation with which our Lord reproves the Pharisees for this perversion of religion, may convince us, that it is of great consequence to understand the nature and value of the several religious duties which we perform, and to proportion our zeal for them, according to their real importance.

In discoursing on this subject, I shall explain the several virtues which our Saviour here enumerates; and shew that these and other moral virtues are the most important parts of our duty, and above all other things in it, deserve our pains and care.

The

The first virtue which our Saviour speaks of is judgment or justice. This, as it is a virtue to be practised by men in a private capacity, in which view only I shall here consider it, is a disposition to abstain from all invasion of the properties and rights of others, and to render them all the things which they can demand as their own. There are some things which all persons obtain a property in from the bounty of nature, such as their life, health, and liberty; and there are other things which they acquire a right to by their own labour and industry, or by fair compact, by legal constitution, or the voluntary donations of others, as riches, lands, and by far the greatest part of the possessions which they have in the world. The preservation of their rights and titles to the things which are thus acquired by them, is the firmest bond of human society, without which it would be impossible for men with any comfort to subsist together. It is therefore necessary that all be allowed to enjoy, use, and dispose of things which are their own: and in allowing them to do so, without usurping their property, or detaining any part of it from them, the

virtue of justice consists. Contrary to which, is the taking away the life of any man at pleasure, or when he has done nothing to forfeit it; the wounding or maiming of his body; the depriving him of his liberty; the blemishing his reputation; the robbing or stealing from him any part of his estate; the deceiving him in matters of commerce, and in compacts; and the retaining his debts beyond the time of payment. All these practices are violations of the properties and rights of others; and if we would act a just and equitable part, we must carefully avoid them; or, if we be sensible that we have offended in any of these particulars, we must, to the utmost of our power, make a reparation of the injuries which we have done to our neighbours; for till we do this, their rights are violated, and our injustice to them is still continued by us.

The next virtue which our Saviour here mentions, is mercy. This consists in a disposition to pity, and to endeavour by all means the deliverance of those who are in misery, or are liable to it. The foundation of it is laid in that tenderness or compassion which is natural to

us,

us, which we must feel whenever any objects of distress are presented to our view: this compassion for the miserable, directly leads us to relieve and assist them. And when in pursuance of the tender and humane propensions of our nature, we afford such persons all the relief and help in our power, we then discharge this important duty of mercy. The assistance which we are to give to the miserable, must be of different kinds, according to the nature of the distresses in which they may happen to be: these may in different ways affect either their minds or their bodies, and so our relief and help must reach to either as there is necessity, and appear in all those instances, whereby we may promote either the spiritual or temporal good of our unhappy brethren, and deliver them either from present or from future misery. Thus, for example, the instructing the ignorant; the reclaiming the vicious, by good counsels and advices, and discreet and kind reproofs; the "restoring those who have been overtaken in a fault, in the spirit of meekness;" the "supporting the weak," and the "comforting the feeble-minded;" are acts of mercy which

are due to unhappy souls ; and they are indeed the most noble and useful expressions of it, as they deliver men from the greatest evils, and make them partakers of the most real and durable happiness. Again ; The visiting and comforting the sick ; the defending the oppressed ; the feeding the hungry ; the cloathing the naked ; the vindicating the credit of those whom we know to be falsely accused ; the repairing the fortunes of such as from a plentiful condition may have fallen into want, by lending to them “ freely, hoping for nothing again,” and remitting to them all such debts, as cannot be expected but by severities which will quite oppress and ruin them ; the giving warning to those who are likely to be ensnared by crafty men ; the moderating our resentment of the offences which men commit against us, the abating as much as we can of the punishment to which the rigour of justice would expose them, and the putting them to no more pain and uneasiness than is necessary for the correction of their tempers, the safety of the public, and our own reputation and security for the future : these are acts of mercy, which we are to perform

form to our unfortunate brethren, with respect to their temporal concerns. This relief and assistance of the distressed, is the most substantial expression of mercy that can be; and without it, it is certain, that all the pity that we can entertain for them, and all our kind wishes for their prosperity, and all the good words that we can give them, will signify nothing at all. St. John cautions us against expressing our kindness to our brethren, only in civil and courteous words, and exhorts us to make it appear in more real and lasting effects. "My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed, and in truth." And St. James teaches us the vanity and unprofitableness of giving bare compliments to our miserable brethren, while we withhold from them that support which we are able to afford them. "If a brother or a sister be naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, Be ye warmed, and Be ye filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things, which are needful to the body, what doth it profit?" Such fair speeches are of no use to unhappy

men, nor do they prove us to be persons of a humane and merciful disposition. The principles of humanity and compassion must certainly have but very little force in our hearts, when the utmost effect of them consists in kind words, and they do not appear in those beneficent actions, which we have an opportunity and ability for performing.

Another important duty here mentioned by our Saviour, is faith. By this we are not to understand what is commonly meant by the word faith in scripture, the assent of the mind to the truth of some propositions or matters of fact, upon the authority of God, who reveals them; but faithfulness or fidelity in our conversation and dealings with all with whom we have any thing to do. This the word frequently signifies, and it appears to be the meaning of it in this place, because this faithfulness is a virtue of the same rank and kind with the other virtues which our Saviour speaks of, which are all good and amiable in themselves; whereas the belief of divine revelation has no intrinsic goodness, but derives its whole value from the principles from whence it springs, and the efficacy which

which it has for producing the virtues which are essentially worthy and lovely in us. This fidelity consists in having a strict regard to truth in our common conversation with mankind, and in using such simplicity and plainness of expression that they may easily understand our real meaning; in performing all our religious vows and promises to God, and in fulfilling all our covenants and engagements with men; in discharging, according to our best skill and ability, all offices and trusts committed to us, either for the public good, or the advantage of particular persons; in being true and constant in our friendships till we have some just cause to alter; and in promoting carefully the interest of all, whom either by our words, or our behaviour, we have encouraged to have a dependence upon us. Contrary to this is lying, dissimulation, the misleading men by artful and equivocal words, flattery, extravagant compliments and high professions of kindness which do not proceed from the heart, perjury, breach of promise, the laying hold on some little circumstances and points of law to evade an equitable obligation, treachery or remissness in the

execution of any important trusts or offices, falshood in matters of friendship, and neglect of the interest of those whom we have allowed to have a confidence in us. These things are all manifestly inconsistent with truth or faithfulness; and if we would practise this virtue, we must always diligently guard against them.

Having thus explained the virtues mentioned in the text; I proceed now to show, that these and such like moral virtues are the most important parts of our duty, and above all other things in it deserve our pains and care.

And this may be made abundantly evident both from the principles of reason, and the declarations of divine revelation.

It will appear from reason, that the moral virtues must be the substance and end of any religion which God would institute among men; whether we consider the nature of God, or man.

If we consider the nature of God; he, according to the account which St. John gives of him, "is Love;" a Being of absolute and perfect goodness, who made the world, and preserves it for the welfare

fare and benefit of his creatures; who intends particularly the happiness of mankind in all his dispensations towards them. It is not therefore to be thought that he would institute a religion among them, the chief design of which would not be to engage them to those things which are the great causes and means of their happiness, which are evidently the virtues of justice, fidelity, humanity, charity, and the love of God himself. Without these virtues, life would soon become a burthen to men, and they could have no satisfaction or enjoyment in it. It is the practice of them, which renders human society agreeable and comfortable to us; they yield us by far the most pleasing sensations of any of which we are conscious; they adorn and perfect our nature, and prepare us for the most noble and delightful employments in a future state of existence. Since then the happiness of mankind depends so necessarily upon these virtues, and flows so directly from them, it may be most rationally supposed, that they would be the things which a Being of perfect goodness would principally have a regard to in any revelation, and in any laws

laws which he would give to us; and that he would lay much greater stress upon them, than upon other things, which are not so necessary, nor tend so immediately to the end, which is evidently most worthy of him in his dealings with men, the promoting their interest and happiness.

Again; If we consider the nature of man; we are so constituted that we cannot but admire and delight in justice, faithfulness, mercy, charity, and the love of God, more than in any other duties, which can be required by the laws of religion. The wise and good Author of our beings, has taken care, in forming us, that these virtues which are so necessary to our happiness, and which give us the greatest pleasures of which we are capable, should carry the most lovely appearance to us; so that we cannot seriously attend to them, but we must be charmed with them, and above all other things esteem and pursue them. Whoever with any care reflects upon himself, and observes the tempers and behaviour of men, will soon be convinced that this is a just account of the frame of our nature. Now from hence
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it may be concluded, that the great stress of any religion, which comes from heaven, will be laid upon these virtues, which our nature determines us thus to approve; for it would be manifestly absurd and unworthy of the wisdom and goodness of God, to suppose that he would appoint a religion to mankind, which would not correspond with the nature which he has given them; or which would oblige us, contrary to the inward sense of our minds, and the generous propensions of our hearts, to pursue any thing more, or so much as these virtues, in which we discern the greatest worth and excellence.

Thus it appears very evidently upon the principles of reason, that the virtues which our Saviour instances in as the principal matters of religion, and others of a similar nature, are really the most necessary parts of it, and more than any other things in it deserve to be regarded by us.

The same thing is still farther evident from the doctrine of the holy scriptures, or the declarations of divine revelation.

The scriptures every where lay the greatest weight upon these amiable virtues,

tues, and represent the practice of them as the main end of religion. Under the Old Testament, it is true that God prescribed to the Jews, a great number of ceremonious external performances; but it is plain, that these were things of very little importance, even in their religion, in comparison of justice, equity, and the love of God. The rites and ceremonies of the law, may indeed be reasonably supposed to have been instituted with a view to secure and promote more effectually the practice of these virtues: it is certain, that whenever the observation of them was not accompanied with moral duties, God was so far from regarding it, that he rejected it with the utmost indignation and abhorrence. “To what
“purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to me, saith the Lord? I am
“full of the burnt-offerings of rams,
“and the fat of fed beasts, and I delight
“not in the blood of bullocks, or of
“lambs, or of he-goats. When ye come
“to appear before me, who hath required this at your hands, to tread my
“courts? Bring no more vain oblations, incense is an abomination unto
“me; the new moons, and sabbaths,
“the

“ the calling of assemblies I cannot away
“ with, it is iniquity, even the solemn
“ meeting. Your new moons, and your
“ appointed feasts my soul hateth; they
“ are a trouble unto me, I am weary to
“ bear them. And when ye spread forth
“ your hands, I will hide mine eyes from
“ you; yea, when ye make many pray-
“ ers, I will not hear: Your hands are
“ full of blood.” After which, he de-
clares to them the proper method of
worshiping and serving him: “ Wash
“ ye, make you clean, put away the evil
“ of your doings from before mine eyes,
“ cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek
“ judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge
“ the fatherless, plead for the widow.”
“ Wherewith shall I come before the
Lord,” says the prophet Micah, “ and
“ bow myself before the high God?
“ Shall I come before him with burnt-
“ offerings, with calves of a year old?
“ Will the Lord be pleased with thou-
“ sands of rams, or with ten thousands
“ of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-
“ born for my transgression, the fruit of
“ my body for the sin of my soul?”
The Prophet speaks this in the name of
one, inquiring into the most acceptable
methods

methods of appeasing and worshipping the Deity; and the answer returned to him is this: "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good, and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" And there are many more passages in the sacred writings of the Old Testament, which plainly teach us, that the duties of justice, truth, integrity, mercy, and goodness in our conversation with mankind, and an humble and reverent deportment towards God, are the most excellent and important things in religion, and far more esteemed by God, than all the sacrifices and other ceremonies of the Jews, which were accepted by him only when they were in conjunction with these virtues, for the sake of which chiefly, they had been appointed.

And now if these virtues were of so much importance under the Jewish dispensation, it may well be thought that they will not be less valuable under the gospel; which is a far more plain and simple institution, than the Jewish religion was. Indeed the great intention of christianity is so evidently to engage men
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to righteousness, truth, and charity, and to the love of God or true piety, that it is unnecessary to quote particular passages to prove it. Whoever with any attention looks into the New Testament, will soon perceive that our Saviour has, in a particular manner, in almost all his discourses, inculcated these virtues; that he has laid the greatest stress of his religion upon them, and made the eternal happiness of his followers to depend upon their practising them; that by his own conduct and example, he has also taught us to prefer them to all other duties; that his apostles have likewise given us the most earnest exhortations to them, and have mentioned them as the chief ingredients in religion, in those descriptions which they have delivered of it; and that the faith of the gospel, and all the positive institutions of it, are of use, only when they are the means of promoting these divine and amiable virtues in us, which are declared to be the end and perfection of all religion.

From what has been said, we may see the great importance of moral duties, and the necessity of inculcating them upon christians. It is wonderful to observe the

the contemptuous opinion which some persons entertain of morality, who speak of it as a thing with which religion is but little or no way concerned, in which if it has any place, it is only the lowest and least considerable ; and who in consequence of this notion of it, cannot endure to hear it much or earnestly pressed upon men ; this, according to their common way of expressing themselves, being all legal and carnal, and not preaching Christ or the Gospel : it might, perhaps, have done well enough, according to them, for a heathen philosopher to have spent his time in explaining and recommending the several parts of moral virtue to his scholars ; but this cannot be the business of a teacher of christianity, who has so many far more spiritual, sublime, and useful subjects to entertain himself and his hearers with. A little conversation in the world may convince us, that these are the sentiments, which many, who imagine themselves to be great proficient in the knowledge of religion, have of the duties of morality, and the virtues of a good life. But whencesoever they may have derived these notions, it is certain, that they have not received them

them from any principles either of reason, or revelation. For both these agree in placing moral duties at the head of all religion; in making them the matters which God principally values in it, and which it became him above all other things to require from men. These, therefore, every wise man will account the substance of his religion, and will lay no stress upon other matters in comparison with them. And whoever would teach religion to any valuable purpose, must chiefly inculcate these duties upon men. Nothing can be more weak and absurd, than to object against the preaching of morality, as if it was not preaching Christ. What! Can any thing be more properly called preaching Christ, than preaching the most essential duties of his religion; than preaching what he himself and his apostles constantly, and with the greatest earnestness, preached, and required from men as absolutely necessary to their answering the end of religion, and partaking of the benefits of it? Is it not evident from the whole tenour of their discourses, that they never laid the least weight upon any opinions and doctrines, but only as they were the
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means of producing a good life; and that therefore the only use which they could make of any doctrines which they delivered concerning Christ, was to propose them as so many motives to engage men more effectually to the obedience of the laws of Christ, or to practise those moral virtues which are required by his religion, which are indeed the sum and substance, the aim and end of all true religion. Let no man therefore think meanly of morality, or despise the preaching of it, as useless and unedifying. All principles which lead men to scorn or neglect it, which make religion something different from it or above it; which prefer some speculative notions and points of belief, or an attendance on the external duties and ceremonies of divine worship, or any matters whatsoever before it, are most apparently false, and have a fatal tendency to defeat the intention of christianity, and to make it good for nothing; and not only so, but to render it a thing of very pernicious consequence to men, as it will prove, in the false light in which such principles set it, the occasion of quieting their consciences, and administering peace and comfort to them

them in the practice of vice and wickedness.

To conclude; From what has been said, we may also learn, whither our endeavours in religion should tend, and what are the things in it, for which we should exert the greatest zeal. We are indeed to reverence the least of God's commandments, and to perform every duty which he requires from us. But we must more especially practise those duties, which are most excellent in their own nature, and of the greatest moment in religion; which, as I have shewn, are the duties of justice, mercy, integrity, and the love of God. We must therefore be above all things careful to raise and cultivate these virtues in ourselves, and make our belief of the doctrines of the gospel, and our attendance on the external institutions of it, entirely subservient to this purpose: and we are never to imagine ourselves sufficiently religious, because we believe truly, and pray frequently, and read the scriptures every day, and go to all the sermons we can hear, and take all occasions of partaking of the Lord's Supper. The end of religion does not consist in these things; but
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in those upright, humane, and generous dispositions with respect to mankind, and that reverent and obedient temper towards God, which they are intended to raise and increase in us. And we only use them to good purpose, when we are improved in such affections, and such a temper by them. There are a great many persons, I know, who are apt to run into a mistake in this matter, to be exceedingly concerned about the external and ceremonial parts of their religion, while those things in which the life and substance of it consist, are almost entirely neglected by them. This was an error which the Jewish nation almost continually went into, for which their prophets never failed most severely to reprove them. And there have been multitudes of christians in all ages who have imitated their example, and fallen into the same mistake, notwithstanding that the gospel has removed that, which probably might have been the occasion of leading the Jews so easily into it, the load of external rites with which their religion was encumbered; and notwithstanding it is so plain an institution, and appears so evidently to consist principally in those virtues

virtues which are seated in the heart and mind. I am far from intending to discourage any man's zeal, even about the lowest instances of his duty, provided it does not make him negligent about those which are of greater consequence. Let those who have leisure from the discharge of more important offices, pray as frequently and devoutly, let them read the scriptures as carefully and diligently, and let them attend on all the external institutions and rites of religion as punctually and exactly as they can. If they do these things with an honest intention of improving and confirming themselves in the practice of virtue, they will certainly find them highly useful for these purposes, and they will be exceedingly blameable if they omit them. But when men are for placing the whole or the greatest part of their religion in these external duties, which are appointed as means and helps to the practice of moral virtue; and when after they have gone their usual round of praying, reading, hearing, meditating, and receiving the communion, they imagine that they have acquitted themselves of their duty, and are become very acceptable to God,

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though it may be evident to them upon the least reflection, that all these devotional exercises have made but few or no good impressions upon their minds; it is extremely necessary to let them know that they are under a gross delusion; that these duties as they manage them have no religion at all in them, but must be looked upon to be only the effects of superstition or enthusiasm. Let us take care therefore to exert our zeal in religion, proportionably to the value of its several duties; let our chief concern be employed about the virtues of justice, fidelity, humanity, and the love of God, which are most evidently the end of religion, which recommend themselves to us by their own intrinsic worth and goodness, and which we are bound above all things to practise by the most sacred and unalterable of all laws, that of our own nature. Let the raising and increasing these amiable virtues in us, be the end of our faith, and all our inquiries after truth and knowledge, and of our use of the instrumental duties of christianity: and when at any time there happens to be a competition between these and any duties of an inferior nature, so that we cannot

cannot perform both; let us always give the preference to these excellent and important virtues. Let us take all opportunities of doing just, kind, generous, and useful actions, though our doing so, may sometimes prevent our observing some positive precepts of the gospel, or our attending on the outward duties of devotion. This is certainly the way to act most agreeably to the nature and intention of religion, and to offer the most acceptable worship and service to the Deity, who has required homage and obedience from mankind to himself, for the more effectual advancement of their welfare and happiness. To Him may all glory and praise be given, both now, and for ever! Amen.

S E R M O N VII.

ON THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST.

I PETER II. 21.

*Leaving us an example, that ye should
follow his steps.*

THE examples of great and illustrious persons, who were eminent for superior degrees of moral goodness, and for the purity, strength, and sublimity of their virtues, have in almost all ages of the world been held in high veneration;

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and

and it has been thought of considerable service to the cause of virtue, as well as a respect due to the memories of those who have excelled in it, to propose such uncommon, such noble and useful characters, as a proper pattern for the rest of mankind to imitate. And for this there is an evident foundation in reason, and in the frame of human nature. For it is undeniable from experience, that the force of good examples is much more universally felt, than that of the wisest precepts, or the most exact and accurate reasonings: they not only instruct, but powerfully persuade; they excite admiration, inspire resolution, work upon the inward native sense of ingenuity, and charm and animate it to exalted and divine improvements. Were we to have the most elaborate draught of moral excellence presented to us in speculation only, we should be apt to esteem it as a fine picture, and be struck, perhaps, with the beauties and graces of it; but might think it, at the same time, wrought up to a romantic strain, and too sublime to be copied in real life. But when we see it as it were substantiated, and are fully convinced that it has
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been actually exhibited in living characters, the ground of despondency and inactivity is entirely removed; a worthy emulation is excited; and we ourselves are not only prompted, but encouraged, to excell.

As for the example which the text speaks of, and which christianity has called us to imitate, it is by far the most high and noble that was ever proposed to the world. And it contains more ample instruction in it than any other, and is adapted to all ranks and stations in human life, as it abounds both with common and universal, and with more extraordinary and heroic virtues; it is an example of unspotted innocence, and therefore, when rightly understood, an unerring and invariable rule: and finally it is an example that is peculiarly persuasive, calculated to impress our minds, and determine and influence our conduct; being that of the author of our religion, of our amiable and compassionate Saviour, of the greatest benefactor and friend to mankind. We ought therefore, though we can never hope to conform perfectly to it, to aim at as near a resemblance of it as is possible, from e-

very motive of decency, gratitude, and interest.

But then, on the other hand, it must be remembered, that there are certain general rules necessary to be observed in the imitation of all examples; and especially of such as transcend common life, and are adorned and heightened by great and extraordinary actions. It is absolutely necessary, in the first place, in order to our forming a just estimate of particular actions, that we carefully examine into the true springs and occasions of them, and consider the situation and character of the agent, and the views and motives by which he was directed and governed; because without this it is impossible for us to know, in several cases at least, whether they actually deserve and demand our imitation, or, indeed, whether they are right and fit in themselves. The very same instances of outward conduct, as they are differently circumstanced, and flow from different principles, may be either eminently wise, or as notoriously absurd; moral, or irregular; proofs of a rational and sober piety, or marks of a heated and blind enthusiasm. And, therefore, unless this
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point be fixed with a tolerable degree of exactness and good judgment, we may happen entirely to desert, or, however, widely to vary from, the pattern which we pretend most strictly to copy after, even when the external behaviour is, in both, the same.

From hence we are naturally led to another rule, and that is, that in following examples which are proposed to us, and most of all distinguished and singular examples, we endeavour to find out those parts which are more immediately adapted to our own condition, to our abilities, rank, and employments, and the relative stations, in which the all-wise Providence of the supreme disposing Mind has thought fit to place us. The habit and temper of piety, of generosity, of benevolence and mercy, may be imitable in all examples, be they ever so great and excellent; but it is obvious to the common sense and experience of mankind, that there are some acts of piety, some expressions of benevolence, some discoveries and proofs of a generous and merciful disposition, that cannot be universally imitated; so that the inward, that is, the true and proper, cha-

rafter may be one and the same; even when there is a necessity, in the nature of things, that it should shew itself in very different instances. And this can never appear in a stronger light, than by applying it to the most holy and finished example of the blessed Author of our religion. To endeavour to be like him in a constant and ardent propensity to do good, and in a life of the most exalted and extensive usefulness, is the eternal duty of all his disciples; but to perform precisely the same beneficent actions, to communicate relief and happiness, to reform the errors and vices of the world, in the same extraordinary way in which he did it, these things can constitute no part of our moral obligations, because they are in our present circumstances absolutely impossible. And in many other cases, unless we take care to maintain the like just distinction, and by that means, acquire a right notion of what it is we are obliged to copy, in the pious and moral example of our Saviour, our religion must run into extravagance; and our virtues instead of being reasonable and attractive, will be justly censured as absurd and unnatural affectation.

I shall

I shall only add one preliminary observation more, which is this, that the most bright and justly celebrated examples of virtue are likely to make the most sensible and deep impression, when they are distinctly illustrated. The general excellence of the whole character taken together, may appear great and admirable; but our esteem and veneration of it will of course increase and be better established, when we see it represented in a variety of agreeable lights; and the uses of it will be accommodated, with less danger of error and greater ease, to the various scenes and conditions of human life. For as in our inquiries into the works of nature, the farther we go in unravelling the curious texture of their parts, their properties and uses, their stupendous form as branches of the general system, their connection with and dependence on each other, and subserviency to the common grand design of order, harmony, and the communication of happiness; as the more exact we are in these inquiries, our wonder and delight are greatly heightened, and the more enlarged ideas we have of the exquisite constitution of the universe, and

the boundless perfection of its infinite Author: so it is likewise with respect to moral examples. The consideration of their general propriety and rectitude is but an inadequate and superficial view, in comparison of that which must be opened to us, by a distinct display of their particular beauties and excellencies. I shall therefore pursue this method in this and the following discourse, and endeavour to delineate the several perfections, that were eminently exemplified in the life of Christ; not presuming that I shall be able to do strict justice to the fair and unspotted original; but hoping, however, to give such a transcript of it, as may be adapted to warm our more refined and generous affections, to inspire an honourable opinion of Christ and his religion, a love of virtue for its intrinsic divine excellence, and more vigorous resolutions to improve in it.

The first thing, that I shall propose, is the example of our blessed Saviour's piety; which was indeed sublime and fervent, but yet, in all the expressions of it, discreet and temperate; being founded in reason and the immutable law of all derived and dependent natures,

tures, and entirely regulated and guided by it. I chuse to begin with this, because it shone so brightly, and with such a superior and excelling lustre, in the life of Christ, and appears to have been, as it were, the vital and animating principle throughout his whole character; and because it is, in itself, the first and supreme obligation incumbent on mankind, and on all intelligent and moral creatures. In the opinion of many indeed, who would be ranked with the most discerning, piety seems not to be a necessary ingredient in great and exemplary characters. In some of the most applauded, especially in modern times, there are found but few and slight traces of it. And yet I can, I think, scarce conceive of any truth, that is more demonstrable and obvious to human reason than this, that there can be no such thing as a strictly moral, and surely then not a finished character, while the duties of piety are entirely neglected. It may indeed have a partial dignity, and be justly celebrated for its other distinguished and useful qualities; but the want of this is so fundamental a defect, that it must, at least, tarnish and obscure all the
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the rest of its boasted excellencies. For is it natural to the mind of man to acknowledge and honour real merit, and can it refuse to adore infinite rectitude? Can it sincerely admire lower characters of virtue, and not be charmed with that of the best of all Beings? Can it love, and be struck with, a confined and defective goodness, and not find its contemplations raised, and its affections warmly excited, by a goodness that is unbounded and immutable? Can it approve of gratitude, and not be grateful to the eternal source of mercy? Such a conduct as this must fail in essential points; and has neither fitness nor consistency to recommend it. For the duties of piety are, properly speaking, nothing else but the exercise of respect, love, and gratitude to the Supreme Being; which, if they are moral and unalterable obligations with respect to our fellow-creatures, must deserve, much more, to be improved and cultivated with respect to Him, who is the gracious and universal Creator. This therefore is the natural, the indubitable, conclusion from the whole—that it is altogether as impossible, in reason, that there should
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ever be a truly noble and complete character without lively sentiments of devotion and piety towards God; as it is that any character should be amiable, without justice, clemency, and generosity to men.

But both these, which are in the nature of things inseparably linked together, were illustriously displayed in our blessed Saviour's example: and it was this union, and admirable harmony, of all the moral virtues, which give it such a transcendent and incomparable glory, that all other examples sink and fade before it. This perfect pattern of all moral rectitude ever maintained and cultivated the most raised and honourable apprehensions of God, and lived in an habitual reverence of his underived and independent glory and majesty, his boundless dominion, his supreme authority; and under an efficacious and invigorating sense of his own constant dependence upon him. The piety of the Saviour of the world was free and generous; not a homage paid to a tyrant, but to the Father and Friend of mankind. It appears to have been a steady and uniform principle, from all his discourses;

courses; from his frequent occasional addresses to the Deity in prayer and praise; as well as from his more uncommon and intense devotions. He gave continual and daily proofs of an ardent zeal for the honour of God; or, in other words, for promoting the right knowledge of his perfections and laws, and an exact and universal resemblance of him. He thought it his "meat to do the will of him that sent him" into the world, "and to finish his work;" that is, it was the refreshment, the delight, of his mind, infinitely superior to the false adulterated gratifications of sensual excess and luxury, to support honourably his place and rank in the universe, and execute the orders of Infinite Wisdom. And being convinced, that it was necessarily determined by the best and most important reasons, he ever preserved that calm, humble, and sublimely rational temper as to be able to say, I not only esteem myself constrained by the duty which I owe to a superior, but I "delight to do thy will, O my God." A very illustrious instance of his command over mutinous and rebellious passions, we find in the last and most distressful scene

scene of his life. For though nature was shocked, and expressed a strong reluctance, at the prospect of undeserved scorn and indignity, and of the shame, tortures, and horrors of a violent and ignominious death, yet he still preserved his constancy, and invincible temper of resignation: "O my Father," says he, "if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt."

Moreover; The religious example, which Christ has in our own nature proposed, and set before us, is an easy and imitable example, free from unnatural and extravagant raptures and transports. It does not consist in mechanical impulses and variable fervors of devotion; in superstitious austerities and enthusiastical visions and intercourses with God; but in worshipping the Father of the universe "in spirit and in truth," with an enlightened understanding, and a serene and purified conscience. The fruits of it were, zeal regulated by knowledge, and tempered with humanity and compassion; the practice of virtue in all its branches; humility, contentment, sobriety, the love of mankind, and a delight in doing good.

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It was not reserved and unsociable, but familiar and affable; and aimed at this as its ultimate end; to promote the glory of the infinite Creator by the moral rectitude, the private and public, the present and eternal happiness, of his intelligent, which are the noblest of, his creatures.

Lastly; The Author of our religion, while he conversed with men here on earth, was not only constant, at all fit seasons, in meditation and private prayer; but regularly and seriously attended the solemn offices of public devotion; and particularly it was, in his opinion, an essential proof of the respect due to Almighty God, to acknowledge his authority in the appointment of positive laws, as well as by a strict observance of those which are unchangeable and moral. It was upon this principle, that he thought himself obliged to submit to John's baptism. And therefore when John made a scruple of performing the office of baptism for one who was advanced so vastly above him; the Son of God, notwithstanding his superior character and the consummate rectitude of his nature, would not be diverted from discharging an obligation which

which he thought indispensably incumbent on him: "For thus," says he, "it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness."

And what excuses, now, that are plausible, and carry the least distant colour of reason, can any of us invent, for depreciating and neglecting laws of the very same kind under the Christian institution, with that which our Lord himself so remarkably honoured, and hath in so forcible a manner recommended to our esteem and veneration, by his own example? We shall not, surely, pretend, that the holy rites of our religion are signs and emblems, that can be of no use but to the vulgar, the weakness of whose reason must be aided, and their affections raised, by sensible images; but that we are too wise, and our notions of things too just and refined, to receive any real improvement from such debased and popular ordinances; we shall not think it decent to make this pretence, when we have his example and authority both directly against us, who was the Wisdom of God. What then shall we offer? Is it this; that we are already so far advanced and confirmed in virtue as to stand in need of no external helps?

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Certain it is, that in such cases, our partiality and pride may easily deceive us; upon which account, it is our wisdom to be more cautious and diffident. But not to insist on this; it is evident to the very lowest understanding, that what is here suggested is a frivolous and insufficient plea, since the Saviour of the world did not think it to have any weight in his own case, though he was perfectly innocent. On the contrary, he looked upon an act of obedience, even to a positive law, to be absolutely necessary to complete his moral character; necessary to maintain a becoming respect to the authority of God; necessary as an example to instruct and influence others; and highly necessary to prevent contempt from being thrown on any one of the divine laws, which, by a too easy transposition, would devolve upon all the rest.

In this, as well as in every other instance of religious obedience, let us then "follow his steps," who, to this end, hath "left us an example"—The excellence of which will be farther illustrated in the next discourse.

S E R M O N VIII.

ON THE EXAMPLE OF
CHRIST.

I PETER II. 21.

*Leaving us an example, that ye should
follow his steps.*

PIETY, and universal virtue, or good morality, are, by the natural connexion and order of things, absolutely inseparable. For all the rules of moral goodness being eternal laws of God, and many of them transcribed, as it were

were, from his own essential perfections; the allowed and habitual neglect of any of them must, of necessity, be inconsistent both with the just esteem of his lovely and excellent character, and with a sincere regard and submission to his authority. But of all the moral virtues, there is none more intimately connected with the genuine spirit and proper duties of piety, than universal benevolence and mercy. For if we reverence the authority of God, this hath enjoined and enforced it upon us; if we honour his example, in this we find it most amiably and gloriously displayed; the nature, which he has given us, strongly inclines and prompts us to it; and his creatures, whose happiness he sincerely desires, are the objects of it.

From the consideration of our Saviour's piety, we therefore, naturally proceed to contemplate his benevolence, his lively and unconquerable benevolence. This is the virtue, that above any other, constitutes loveliness of character; and it is withal, the inseparable companion of true greatness of mind. And, with respect to this generous and God-like virtue, the example of Christ deserves a
very

very particular attention, and to be admired and celebrated with the highest applause. It may be extremely serviceable for our direction, as to the excellent nature, the great importance, the immutable necessity of universal love and charity: it may likewise be peculiarly serviceable to warm and animate every kind and friendly affection, that nature hath implanted within us; to extirpate all the seeds of base and selfish passions; to inspire a disinterested, steady, diffusive, goodness; and generous unextinguishable ardour and delight in beneficent actions.

If we review the particulars of our blessed Saviour's benevolence, we shall find it to be, in all, noble and truly divine. To do good was the constant employment, the principal business, of his life. His very retirements, his meditations, his prayers were in a great measure devoted to the most substantial happiness of mankind: but his public converse, with the world, was almost one entire scene of kind and useful offices. Wherever he appeared, ease and joy were his constant attendants. He recovered speech to the dumb, sight to the blind, the calm and regular use of reason to the distem-

distempered in mind ; restored those to the privileges of social creatures, who for foul and loathsome diseases, were excluded from human society ; and relieved the sorrows of tender parents and affectionate relatives, by miraculously raising their children and friends from the dead. In a word, the far greater part even of his extraordinary operations were, like the fixed and constant temper and habit of his mind, friendly to all objects that presented themselves, and scattered the blessings of health and peace all around him. But great and godlike as all this may appear, the benevolence of Christ had a far nobler aim, and took a much wider and more extended scope. His chief view was to instruct the ignorant, and reform the erroneous and vicious, to establish truth, and promote universal virtue and rectitude of life ; and, consequently, to advance the supreme honour and endless felicity of reasonable beings, For this he underwent innumerable fatigues ; with a view to this he directed all his studies, and was fearless of reproach or danger ; and at last, the more effectually to accomplish this high and grand design, he freely, and with an heroic

roic greatness of mind, consented to submit to death. So that he may be properly said to have died a martyr for the universal good, the supreme and everlasting good of mankind; and thus, his benevolence which in the former parts of his life, no difficulties could controul, no ingratitude restrain, no injuries discourage, was elevated to its utmost pitch of perfection by triumphing over the ignominy and terror of death.

And as the most humane and nobly benevolent hearts, have always been distinguished by a strong sense of compassion, so we find it in the life of Christ; in which this tender and generous virtue was most admirably displayed. It is the property of little and contracted minds to be hard and insensible; but great spirits easily melt, and relent at the distresses of their fellow-creatures. To be softened by benevolent affections, and dissolved in pity, is an honour to the human mind, but to be dissolved by the effeminate pleasures of luxury is mere animal passion, that depresses reason and the moral faculties. The latter of these therefore, could find no place in the perfect example of the Son of God; but the former

was gloriously displayed, and shone in its utmost lustre. Compassion was so natural to his elevated and divine temper, that the most common incidents of life were sufficient to raise a strong and lively sense of it. And it exerted itself towards his most determined and inveterate enemies. For when a little before the destruction of that blinded and ungrateful city, he beheld Jerusalem at a distance, we are informed by the sacred historian, that with the most sensible and deep concern he deplored her unhappy fate, and the desolation that would shortly be brought upon her by the Roman arms, as a punishment of her unbelief and impenitence.

Add to all this, that we may find, in the life of Christ, a bright example of the tenderest affection and sympathy of friendship. For when the relations and friends of Lazarus were lamenting, and in sore affliction, at his death, his soul immediately took the impression of their grief, and Jesus wept; Jesus wept, though he knew their loss would soon be repaired, and though he came determined to repair it by his miraculous power. Jesus therefore wept not for the death of Lazarus;

Lazarus; but from a mind strongly susceptible of compassion, and that naturally bore a part in the sighs and complaints of the afflicted. From whence we learn, that the soft heart which easily relents, and the tear of commiseration that kindly falls for the distresses of others, is one of the most infallible indications of a sublime and great spirit, and an ornament to the most exalted characters. There is indeed such an inward satisfaction, such a consciousness of true dignity attending it, as is not to be described. From pains of this kind springs one of the noblest of all our pleasures: so wisely and graciously has the God of nature ordained it, that the compunction and uneasiness, which we feel from so generous a principle, should not be unmixed sorrow; but be accompanied with inward approbation and end in joy: that whilst it is in its consequences so highly beneficial to our fellow-creatures, we ourselves might not be the only sufferers by it; nor consequently be tempted to discourage or resist that implanted sense of humanity, which is the orphan's hope, and the refuge of the poor and miserable.

But to proceed: another excellent property of that benevolence and goodness, which so illustriously distinguished the life of Christ, is, that it was calm, gentle, and forgiving. It could not be irritated by any provocations, to a desire of revenge, nor be prevailed upon, by the most gross and undeserved indignities, to attempt a retaliation; but preserved an entire command over all resentful and boisterous passions, and ardently desired the happiness of the enemy and the persecutor, whilst it suffered by their malice. It was a constant maxim with the Son of God, to triumph over the insolence and injustice of his oppressors by an uninterrupted course of good offices; and conquer his enemies, not by force, but by meekness, compassion, and generosity. “He
“ was brought as a lamb to the slaughter,
“ and as a sheep before her shearers is
“ dumb, so he opened not his mouth:
“ when he was reviled, he reviled not
“ again; when he suffered, he threatned
“ not; but committed himself to him
“ that judgeth righteously.” And this branch of his example is, for its extraordinary amiableness and dignity, particularly recommended by the Apostle Peter,

ter, just after the words of my text, to the strict imitation of all christians. And surely, with the highest reason; because it discovers such a freedom and greatness of mind, such an established virtue, such a steady and insuppressible benevolence of temper, as are never found but in the most raised and God-like characters.

But the excellency and uncommon lustre of our blessed Saviour's example, in this respect, will appear in a yet stronger light to excite our esteem and admiration, if we turn our thoughts to particular instances. We shall then find, that the mild and charitable Author of our religion was a declared enemy to persecution, and to all methods of severity and violence, though upon the most plausible and specious pretences. For when two of his disciples, transported by a frantic and cruel zeal, proposed to him to command "fire from heaven" to destroy the rude and ungenerous Samaritans, who refused him a passage through one of their villages, for no other reason but because he was going to Jerusalem; and who, besides the affront which they offered to him, and their contempt of his prophetic character, were notorious

apostates from the true religion, that was revealed and instituted by God himself: when two of his disciples proposed his revenging himself in so signal a manner on these inhospitable, schismatical, and apostate Samaritans; he rejected the motion with a noble resentment, and a severe rebuke of their intemperate zeal, in these remarkable words: "Ye
" know not what manner of spirit ye
" are of: for the Son of man is not come
" to destroy men's lives, but to save them." To injure any on account of their disrespect to him, and for the sake of their errors and corruptions in faith or worship, was absolutely repugnant to the genius of his religion, and to the uniform course of his meek and beneficent life.

Farther; Let us view the Friend and Saviour of mankind, when most heinously insulted, and under the most grievous scenes of his distress and suffering, and we shall find that the same sweetness of disposition, the same unruffled spirit of soft and mild benevolence still possessed him, and triumphed compleatly and gloriously over proud and malignant passions. We all of us feel, that when our honour is stained by the rude attacks
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of calumny, when we are unjustly despised, and suffer groundless abuse and wrong, through the baseness and ingratitude of the world; it is extremely difficult, and an excellence that few, very few, can attain, to preserve the evenness and composure of our tempers. Passion is apt to grow unruly, and inspire designs of revenge; and in the midst of this tumult within, the voice of reason is not heard, and the motions of benevolence are scarcely felt. But if we would accustom ourselves to contemplate, frequently, the example of the Son of God with a becoming seriousness and veneration, this would be a most effectual means to extirpate all the seeds of malice and ungoverned resentment; and while we abhorred the injury, it would teach us to maintain humanity and tenderness towards the injurious. For this divine person had led an innocent, peaceable, and inoffensive life; he was conscious to himself of no views, but what directly tended to the good of mankind; he never gave to any one of his countrymen the least ground for just complaint; but for his exemplary services to the world deserved universal love and honour. But when, not-

withstanding all this, he was branded with public infamy, apprehended as a notorious malefactor, and his life sacrificed to save that of a vile detestable murderer; when the priests and leading men of the Jewish nation made it an act of religion, and a point of eminent merit, to conspire and procure his death; when he was exposed, with mock-pageantry, to the derision and rage of the multitude; and after many preparatory indignities, was at length to glut the insatiate cruelty of his enemies, devoted to death, even the death of slaves and of the worst of criminals: do we find, under all these unparalleled provocations, that his meekness and universal benevolence deserted him, and gave him up a prey to anger and impatience? Was there so much as one expression dropt from him, which favoured in the least of fierceness and inhumanity? Did he discover the least tincture of an implacable and forgiving spirit? His friends will not blaspheme his character so much, as to cast such a dishonourable imputation upon him; and, in this particular, his very enemies must be ashamed to defame him. For his passions were entirely calm, his commiseration was

was strong and lively, and his generosity unconquerable throughout the whole course of his sufferings. He resented, with a lively feeling of humanity, every thing that had the appearance of cruelty, even against those that sought his life; and therefore miraculously healed "the high-priest's servant," sent to apprehend him, whom one of his disciples had wounded: and he died gloriously, praying for his persecutors; and as a proof of the noblest benevolence, and a perfectly serene and undisturbed mind, urging the only circumstance, that could be thought of, in extenuation of their guilt. This remarkable prayer is recorded by St. Luke, in these words; which will doubtless be remembered to the everlasting honour of our Saviour's example; "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

We read indeed, sometimes, of his giving severe and reproachful names to persons eminent, and distinguished by their wickedness: but this is consistent with the utmost meekness and composure of spirit, whenever it is necessary, as it then was, to expose popular vices; hypocrisy and malice, under the mask of

devotion: and craft, rapaciousness, and oppression, screened and recommended by their appearing in high characters. Our Lord's censures were only just reproofs, seasonable protests against flagrant immoralities; and from which, as he appeared in the sublime character of the Messenger and Prophet of God, no considerations of prudence, complaisance, or decency, could be sufficient, in reason, to restrain him. For his office was to rebuke sin impartially; and the extraordinary credentials, which he brought from heaven, would support and justify him in detecting and shaming vice wherever he found it, even in the most sacred and exalted stations. The weight and authority of his own mission, and the virtue and happiness of the world, both demanded it.

And when in some passages of the New Testament, anger is ascribed to Christ; it never denotes that wild and extravagant passion, those transports of rage, that confusion and perturbation of thought, that thirst after revenge and blood, which are too usual marks of anger in precipitate and ungoverned tempers, and drive humanity and mercy from
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the heart: it was nothing more than a generous indignation against sin. His resentment was not levelled at the person of the offender; but at his dissimulation, perfidiousness, cruelty, and other crimes, which are justly and highly offensive to the wise and virtuous. We are therefore expressly told, that while he looked round about on the pharisees with anger, he was grieved "for the hardness of their hearts:" his soul was at the same time open to kind impressions, and he generously pitied their unhappy depravity. So that our blessed Saviour's benevolence was as incapable of being obscured by violent and disordered passions; as it was of being lessened by injuries, or discouraged by the fear of death.

And as this excellent virtue was in the character of Christ calm, mild, and forgiving; it was also humble and condescending. The everlasting good of mankind was the ultimate end he had in view; to accomplish this end, the Son of God submitted to lead a life of poverty, affliction and disgrace, and closed the scene of his humiliation by a violent and ignominious death. This astonishing instance of condescension, speaks to Chris-

tians of every degree and character this language: "Look not every one on
"your own things, but every man also
"on the things of others; let this mind
"be in you, which was also in Christ
"Jesus." Let the example of his divine
condescension, if you have merely a re-
gard to decency of character, shame you
out of your pride and haughtiness; and
teach you to know your nature, and your
duty, better, than to think it any dispa-
ragement to your brightest accomplish-
ments, or the highest worldly honours,
to practise the necessary humilities of
true goodness; to consult and labour,
and sacrifice popularity, grandeur, nay
life itself, for the prosperity and wel-
fare of your fellow-creatures. For
the inflexible temper of pride, and a
disdainful treatment of your inferior bre-
thren, are not more unsuitable to human
nature, and the reason of things, than
they are a direct contradiction to the spi-
rit of christianity, and to the conduct of
its Author; who himself says, "take my
"yoke upon you, and learn of me: for
"I am meek and lowly in heart."

During the whole time of his public
ministry, he was peculiarly remarkable,
for

for a frank and obliging humanity of behaviour, to all who had the honour to converse with him. He lived both with his friends, and carried himself towards strangers, with an open generous familiarity; was easy of access; and ready to communicate instruction and relief to every fit and worthy object. He was of a modest un aspiring temper, and industriously shunned grandeur and ostentation; avoiding company, and chusing solitude, when the people infatuated by their expectations of the temporal reign of the Messiah, would have taken him by force to make him a king. And from this humble disposition, sprang that contentment and entire tranquillity of mind, which he always expressed in low and despised circumstances: as his being placed in such circumstances suggests another very important reason (besides the force of his example) for the practice of these virtues, by giving us an undeniable demonstration, that contempt and poverty are no marks of the anger and displeasure of heaven, since they were the lot of him who was perfectly innocent, and the beloved Son of God.

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To all these excellent and useful virtues was added, in the life and example of Christ, an unconstrained and inviolable integrity; not rash, and incautious, and courting dangers unnecessarily; but guided by a just discretion, and yet steady and inflexible. In his doctrine, he so far consulted the prejudices of his hearers, as to open and enlarge their minds by degrees. He avoided the persecutions of his enemies, and the effects of their implacable malice, when he could do it with honour and a good conscience. But he never used any arts to deceive them into wrong meanings; never, by studied ambiguities of speech, flattered and confirmed them in their errors. He opposed corruption and vice, however universal and fashionable, however distinguished and dignified; and at last bravely died in maintaining his own integrity, and for the cause of truth and virtue, which are the cause of God and man.

Such are the great lines of the excellent and divine example of our Saviour Jesus Christ. I shall only add, that our profession and character, as christians, oblige us to make this example as far as it has now been exhibited (and in all the other

other branches of it, in which it is capable of being imitated) the model of our own lives: or, in the language of St. John, that every one that abideth in Christ, "ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked."

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S E R M O N IX.

ON LIVING PEACEABLY.

ROMANS XII. 18.

*If it be possible, as much as lieth in you,
live peaceably with all men.*

THERE are many excellent precepts and rules of duty laid together by the Apostle towards the end of this chapter; but none of greater moment to be earnestly inculcated upon Christians, and duly observed, than this which I have chosen for the subject of the present discourse.

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As to the nature of the precept here given of "living peaceably," I need not use many words to tell you what it is; it is easily and universally understood. Would to God, it were but as universally practised! and then such exhortations as these would be needless. But though an account of the duty may not be requisite, to inform even the meanest and most ignorant Christian, yet it may be of use to bring to his mind what he already knows, and to awaken in him strong and lively impressions of it: and to that end, I shall in a very brief and plain manner describe it.

To "live peaceably," is so to demean ourselves in all the offices and stations of life, as to promote a friendly understanding and correspondence among those we converse with; so as to prevent, as much as we can, all outward contention and strife, nay, all inward mistakes and jealousies from arising, and to quench and allay them as soon as we can, whenever they are risen; so, as to disagree openly with no man in things of an indifferent nature, and of no moment; and, where the point is of importance enough to deserve to be insisted on, there to do it,
with

with so much candor, and modesty, and sweetness, as not to offend even those we do not agree with. In a word, it is so to conduct our actions, discourses, and dealings, as to make ourselves and others as easy as is possible. Various are the instances of this duty; some influencing our behaviour with respect to the public, some regarding our conduct towards private men.

They “live peaceably” with respect to the public, who pay a due regard to the laws of their country, and express a due reverence towards their superiors; honouring them sincerely, obeying them submissively; not rashly censuring their actions, but putting the best and most candid construction upon them; not being over busy in matters that are too high for them, and do not concern them.

They “live peaceably” in matters of common life and daily practice, who take care to make their carriage inoffensive and obliging; who are not ready to entertain ill reports of men, much less to disperse them; who whisper about nothing to set friends and neighbours at variance; who mind their own business, without intermeddling

meddling much in the concerns of others; who can take a slight affront or injury in conversation without resenting it, and even a great one without returning it.

But I forbear to give any further description of so known a duty; and go on to consider the extent of it. It must be practised towards "all men:" not only towards those who are on good terms with us, but towards those who are not; not only to the good-natured and candid, but even to the captious and the froward. For, as our Saviour argues in a like case, if you live peaceably with them only, who live peaceably with you, "what thank have you? Do not even sinners the same?" The worst, and worst natured men will go thus far: for there is no temptation to break peace with those who live inoffensively with us, no room for contention with the mild and complying; the trial of our temper is, when shocking accidents happen to us, when ill words are given us; when we are touched in point of interest and honour; or in any other respect drawn into a dispute, and forced to engage: then, to bear opposition meekly, to ward off the anger of our adversaries by a discreet
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and dextrous address ; to keep ourselves free from the contagion of that passion and that resentment which reigns in them, or free at least from the outward and visible signs of it ; this is no vulgar attainment, but a very great pitch of christian perfection. And the Apostle therefore, at the very time he is giving the precept, acknowledges the great difficulty that there is sometimes in obeying it : “ If it be possible,” says he, and “ as much as in you lies ;” intimating, that in respect of some natures, and in some circumstances, it is scarce possible, though we do whatever in us lies, to come up to it.

To “ live peaceably with all men,” in the strictest sense of the words, is a thing absolutely impossible, and out of our reach ; for it depends on what we are not masters of, the dispositions and passions of other men. Let us take what care we can to prevent mistakes, they will sometimes arise ; let us with ever so much caution avoid doing injuries, we cannot always avoid receiving them ; some churlish and savage natures there are that delight in outrages, and are moved with no condescensions, no compliances ;
“ such

“such sons of Belial,” as was said of Nabal, “that a man cannot speak to them.” Where violent incroachments are made upon our fortune or good name, we not only may, but must vindicate ourselves from them, though breach of peace, and an open rupture with any man attend our doing it. Slight affronts, and small acts of injustice we may put up with; but where we are wounded to the quick, either in our estate, or reputation, we are not at liberty to be silent: to be upon our defence in such cases, is a debt we owe to ourselves, our posterity, our relations, and friends, who have all an interest in us.

However, in all these cases, where we lay aside peace for a more valuable end, we are bound to have an eye to it, even while we seem to overlook it; and must so break with men on such occasions, as to leave room, and to prepare the way for a reconciliation. War itself has its rules and restraints, within which its savage cruelties are bounded: much more must the measures of our resentment, in such breaches as these, be tempered with great humanity and great prudence. We must recover our right, and wipe off aspersions without rancour or revenge;
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our resentments must never so far transport us, as to make us say any thing of any man, but what our cause and his character will justify; nor endeavour to inspire people with worse opinions concerning him, than we in our consciences believe he deserves. And to preserve ourselves thus far upon our guard, when we are engaged in a quarrel, is a much harder task than not to engage at all; and will require our calling in to our aid all the pious helps and expedients, with which reason and religion will furnish us; and which therefore I shall now point out to you.

The rise of most of our disquiets and discords is, from the tumultuous and disorderly motions of our passions; and these therefore must be well regulated, especially that fierce and boisterous passion of anger, which discovers itself the earliest, and is tamed the latest of any; and is, of all others, the greatest enemy of our repose. This therefore, and the rest, must be brought under the discipline and government of reason, if we ever hope to be easy to ourselves or other men; and indeed, unless we are first easy to ourselves, it is impossible we
should

should ever be so to others. We may as well expect perpetual sunshine in climates subject to storms and hurricanes, as that there should be a lasting peace in that breast, where passions are allowed to reign.

The next plain help towards "living peaceably," is, if we moderate our desires, and contract our designs, with regard to the good things of life, contenting ourselves with such a share of them, as answers all the good ends of living, and not eagerly grasping after more than would be of real use to us, if we had it: the wants and conveniences of nature are known, and certain, and soon supplied; but imaginary wants are infinite and endless; and he that has fet his heart upon them, will find it very difficult ever to recall it. He is got beyond reason in his desire, and will probably decline no unreasonable method of obtaining it. And the natural issue of this must be perpetual feuds and bickerings, contentions and struggles; for our desires will meet those of other men, as eager as our own, and as impatient of being resisted. "From whence come wars and fightings?" says St. James,
"Come

“Come they not hence, even of your lusts?” that is, from your covetous desires; for so it follows: “Ye lust, and have not; ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain.”

A third rule in this case, is to have a watchful eye upon ourselves, in our first entrance upon any debate or contest; and at that time to be sure to keep the reins closely in our hands, when there is the most danger in giving a loose to them; and they are the most easily manageable. For let us but indulge ourselves a little in the first motions of warmth and resentment, and by insensible steps and degrees we may be wrought up at last into all the height of madness and folly. The beginning of strife (saith the wise man) is as when one letteth out water. When the bank is once broken down, we do not know how far it may flow, or how deep a space it may fill.

To this we may add a particular vigilance over ourselves with regard to the intemperance of the tongue, that “member which setteth on fire the course of nature, and is itself set on fire of hell.”

We must restrain it in every respect, but especially in relation to that natural

proneness it has towards publishing the faults of others ; which ought never to be done, but with the utmost caution and tenderness. We can never strictly justify ourselves in speaking evil of any man, though that evil should be true, but when either the seal of friendship binds up the discourse, or the rules of charity and justice require us so to do. The son of Sirach seems to carry this matter very far: " Whether it be to friend or foe," says he, " talk not of other men's lives, and, if thou canst without offence, reveal them not ;" which seems to bar us from spreading an ill report of any man, but when we are under an absolute necessity of doing it. He that governs himself constantly by this rule, takes one of the surest and most promising steps towards " living peaceably with all men."

Especially if he keeps himself always from embarking in parties and factions, and falling in with vehemence into all the interests and designs of them. This will necessarily in time imbitter his spirit, and sour his humour, make him like and dislike men implicitly, and lead him into
many

many resentments, which he has nothing to do with.

Again; Let a man that desires to pass through this world inoffensively, resolve to be very diligent in his particular profession and calling; and if he has none, to make one to himself, by some proper and suitable employment. He that is employed, has no leisure to move in the little disputes and quarrels which trouble the peace of the world, and which are chiefly kept up and toft to and fro by those who have nothing else to do. The Apostle therefore, we may observe, in his exhortation joins "studying to be quiet," with the "doing our own business," as if the one was a natural and inseparable attendant on the other.

Above all, let him add fervent and unwearied prayer to the blessed Author of peace, and Lover of concord, that he would please to vouchsafe him the inestimable benefits of it, and endue him with the qualities that promote it, by the powerful operation of that Spirit, whose fruits, love, joy, and peace are peculiarly said to be; who inhabiteth only with those, who do in some measure partake of them, and who to those, with whom he inhabits,

imparteth them yet more and more abundantly.

“Now may the God of peace make
“us perfect in every good work to do
“his will, working in us that which is
“well pleasing in his sight, through Je-
“sus Christ our Lord.” Amen.

S E R M O N X.

THE NATURE AND DUTY OF PUBLIC SPIRIT.

PHILIPPIANS II. 4.

*Look not every man on his own things:
but every man also on the things of
others.*

THERE are hardly any words more common in the mouths of men, than public spirit; a regard to the public; the good of the public; the love of our country; and many others of the like sort: which are indeed, in their

original design, but different expressions of one and the same thing. The great point is, what these words ought truly to signify; what temper and disposition of mind; what practice and conduct of life, they ought to represent and design. I propose therefore from these words, to consider the true foundation, nature, and extent of public spirit; the bad disposition, and vice, opposite to it; the effects in which this virtue will shew itself; and the motives there are, to the cherishing and improving it in ourselves.

The foundation of it is laid in that virtuous love of ourselves, which is joined with the love of others, united with us in human society: and it must be supported by that great and god-like disposition of mind, which desires and labours to plant happiness, where it is not; and to continue it where it is. And this is the same thing with that comprehensive love and charity towards others, which the gospel came to restore, and to inflame: but this, not so as to exclude that reasonable regard to ourselves, and our own concerns, which never is, nor can be a vice. So far from it, that as long as we are members of human society, nothing
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can more secure and improve our own happiness, than this regard to the happiness of that society, of which we are members. We can do nothing for that good end, but what will reflect back its happy influences upon ourselves, in some degree or other: as every law for the preservation and glory, and happiness of the public, is a law in which all the members of the public must find their own account, and their own security. So that a public spirit is not founded upon a regard to others, inconsistent with a regard to ourselves in a good sense; but really takes in that virtuous and praiseworthy self-love, which considers our own true and lasting interest, as closely united with the happiness and interest of all around us.

This may appear the more clearly, if you consider the very method, and end, of these engagements of mankind with one another, in their entering into the terms of human society. Before you suppose this engagement, or compact, or whatever you will call it, every man was, properly speaking, one by himself; guarding himself alone, against others; taking

every thing for his support, which could come within his reach; and having himself alone, under his own care and protection. The first step towards human society must arise, in the nature of the thing, from a desire of a more settled security, than every man, by himself, could find in his own defence and protection; joined with a benevolent desire of the same good to others, which every one found the want of, in himself. And the nature of the stipulation, or agreement, must have been this; not to profess or pretend to throw off all concern for themselves; or to regard the happiness of others, in a way inconsistent with their own: but to engage for that mutual strength and support, which should be the happiness of all the members of society; that is, of themselves as well as of others.

The public spirit, therefore, we are now speaking of, as it respects human society, must be founded upon the original design, and end, of human society; which was, in the intent of every man, the good and happiness of himself, considered in conjunction with the good and happiness of others.

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This will lead us to the true account of the opposite vice. For it is plain from what hath been said, that this doth not consist in regarding ourselves; provided we regard ourselves as members of society, united in the bonds of friendship and union with many others, for the same end of mutual preservation and happiness; but that the crime consists in regarding ourselves in such a manner, as doth in effect take us again out of that society, into which we were entered; and shews that we consider ourselves, as retired back again into that state, in which we were originally our own supporters, and our own defenders, without regard to any but ourselves. This every one sees plainly, in the case of notorious offenders, in instances which public infamy and constant punishment have marked with disgrace; such as open robbery, and violence, and rapine. But it is as true, and as certain, in all other, less observed, and less notorious instances. For as men practising those vices, have for their own present humour, or passion, voluntarily removed themselves out of that society, in which they were once engaged: so whoever, out of a

false regard to themselves; either for a present gratification of covetousness, pride, ambition, revenge, or the like, hinder the least good, or procure the least evil, to the public, these men are in that instance, and that degree, upon the same footing with the others. They are so far got loose from the bonds of human society. They so far regard themselves as particulars, standing by themselves. They have so far torn themselves from the ties and concerns of social engagements. And though they may avoid the infamy of common disgrace, which generally follows nothing but public and shameful punishment; yet in reality they are but just where the others are; that is, they are gone back into a state directly opposite to that of human society; and are divested of all real title to the advantages of a condition, from which they have voluntarily separated themselves.

The question therefore, to any man upon this subject, is only this, Whether, upon any occasion, he will regard himself, and his own immediate passions and views, (which he supposeth his present good) in distinction and opposition to
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the good of society; or, whether he will be content to regard himself, as a member of society; and his own particular good and happiness, as united and consistent with the good and happiness of others. In the former case, his choice immediately dissolves the relation between him and others, and gives them a right to look upon, and treat him, as a public enemy. In the latter case, his choice is directed by a benevolent temper to himself, as well as to others; and by a desire of the happiness of others, as united with his own, in the same great concerns.

It follows naturally, upon what hath been said, that it is this desire of the happiness of others, this generous and diffusive love of mankind, which, in all seasons, and upon all occasions, will be our chief defence against falling into the vice I have been now speaking of. For though, at the beginning, the first thought of entering into the terms of society, was owing to the wants, and defects, which every particular man found in himself, for his own particular support and preservation; yet the end of that society must be answered, and maintained, by that equitable rule,
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of not expecting from others, what we ourselves are not ready to afford them, in all like circumstances. And, in order to afford them, what we think reasonable to expect from them, we must feel, and improve in ourselves the love and desire of the happiness of the world about us; and fix it as a steady principle of our own conduct, that it is not only strictly agreeable to the very engagements of human society, in which we are entered; but that it is highly glorious, and honourable, to add to the happiness, and to diminish the miseries of others, as far as our power and influence can extend themselves.

The great necessity and usefulness of having such a support, laid deep in a well-disposed mind, will appear to any who will give themselves the trouble of remarking the many powerful, and too often successful enemies there are, to this good and benevolent spirit. Sometimes covetousness, and sometimes pride; sometimes the ambition and thirst of power, and sometimes the revenge and rage of disappointment will overturn the minds of men on a sudden; and make them forget that they are entered into society
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with their neighbours : unless they have firmly fixed it in their own judgments, that it can never be dishonourable for them to promote the happiness of others; nor ever be honourable for them in any degree, to take themselves back again to themselves, after they have once entered into all the engagements of human society. And this can never be firmly fixed in any mind in which that vicious selfishness reigns, which banishes all disposition towards making others happy; and plants in its room a cold neglect of all the rest of mankind. Many a one who would start at the thought of being an open murderer, or robber, yet is sometimes found to indulge himself out of some poor private view or resentment, in acting a part which puts him as much out of society, and is in its effects, perhaps of more fatal consequence to the happiness of mankind, than thousands of robberies and private acts of violence. The same law of equity, condemns the one, which condemns the other. The same reasons engage us against the one, which engage us against the other. The same end of society, and the same desire of the happiness of others, rightly considered, and thoroughly

thoroughly imbibed, would effectually prevent or cure them both. And in cases, where no public temporal punishment follows, nothing but a good principle within, can be of any lasting good consequence.

As for the effects, that will be seen to flow from hence; public spirit, or the love of our country, or whatever it may be called, will not shew itself, as if it were the love of a particular climate, or soil; or of a particular constitution of government, whatever it be, merely because we happen to be born under it: but it will appear in all the genuine effects of a sincere desire of the happiness of society, and of ourselves, considered as members of society. It will answer those ends and engagements of human society, upon which it is built; and produce all the fruits of that love of mankind, which we can never forbear to extol and applaud, wherever we meet with it. It will act with a view to our own happiness, considered as tempered in such a manner with that of others, as that we can never destroy our own lasting interest, whilst we promote the common interest in which our own lives and
breathes.

breathes. It is something as far removed from noise and passion in words; as it is from pride, ambition, covetousness, or revenge, in actions. It doth not always, indeed, sooth and flatter our present passion, or every immediate view of personal profit, or power; but it always tends to secure, even our private good, which we have, by entering into society, mixed with the good of others. In a word, it is seen in a constant regard to the interest of that society, from which our own cannot be separated: and consists, not in a neglect of ourselves; but in a regard to others, closely united, in the same common happiness, or common misery, with ourselves.

I come now to treat of the motives and inducements to this disposition, and practice. And, as I have hitherto considered public spirit with regard to human society; so the first motive naturally ariseth from hence, that the ends and engagements of human society make this the duty of every man, who is not willing to appear false to his honour, and to his assurances. There is no need of any explicit formal contract in this case. For whoever thinks he hath reason to expect the
privileges,

privileges, the protection, the support arising from society, which I believe few will think they have forfeited, doth by that very thought effectually give, or renew the necessary assurances on his own part. He acknowledges himself bound by all the ties of that society; and consequently obliged in honour and conscience to regard himself, not as a person by himself, with his own private passions and humours only to gratify, but as one of a number of men whose happiness and interest is one and the same. Whenever therefore he separates his own good, from that of the whole, into which he professeth voluntarily to throw it every hour that he lives under the benefit and protection of social laws; he sins against those useful obligations; with much more dishonour, and many more fatal consequences than a man who breaks his private agreement, or revokes his verbal promise, or his written bond. It is in vain indeed, that men are entered into the ties of society, unless they look upon that very entrance into them, as a strict obligation upon them to act agreeably to those ties.

So that, if you only consider yourselves
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as members of human society, you have the strongest motive, which honour, and reason, and equity, can suggest; that is, the motive taken from the bonds, and engagements, you have brought yourselves under; to perform, on your part, what in reason you may expect from others in the same circumstances; and what is agreeable and answerable to the privileges and protection you think yourselves entitled to, from the body politic. It is absolutely unreasonable and absurd, for any one who hath any sense of virtue and honour left, to presume to claim the benefits of laws, and the supports arising from human society, unless he be ready, on his own part, to pay back again all the reciprocal duties respecting the good of the whole: which he doth, in effect, promise and vow to do, whenever he expects those benefits. The first motive therefore is this. You are entered into the engagements of human society. You are obliged in conscience and honour to answer those engagements. And consequently, are obliged to regard the happiness of that society, in which your own is concerned; and your own private inclinations, or
passions,

passions, no farther, than as they are consistent, not only with the security, but with the happiness, of the public.

If from hence we proceed to consider ourselves as reasonable creatures, brought into being by the great Father of all things; and capable of finding out his existence, nature, and perfections; we shall be persuaded, that we can never be so great in ourselves, as when we conform ourselves to his will, or imitate his perfections. And, when we know that he loves to communicate happiness; and that his great glory is, mercy, and goodness, diffused to all beings, who do not make themselves incapable of them: this will be a powerful motive to all who know his name, to esteem it as their own great glory and honour, to resemble him, in that good and benevolent disposition, to which they themselves owe all that they enjoy, and all that they can hope for.

If we now consider ourselves as christians, we shall find that the best religion is founded in love; and that this love is not a passion, or a fancy, or an enthusiasm, of the mind; but the beneficence of practice; that it consists, not in profession,

feſſion, and words, but in deed and action; that it hath no other ſignification, in the law of chriſtians, but doing good, that is, adding to the happineſs, or diminishing the miſeries, of others. This is that true friendſhip, with regard to particular perſons, which alone deſerves that name; and this is that true public ſpirit, with regard to the whole ſociety to which we belong, which comprehends and enlivens every duty we owe to it. If we have chriſtian charity, we have that beneficent temper which promotes the good of others; and the more diffuſive and extenſive this is, the more chriſtian it is: and if we feel nothing of the deſire of the happineſs of others, in us, we are certainly void of all that love, which is the foundation, and eſſence, of the goſpel.

The laſt thing I ſhall mention, is ſelf-love and ſelf-intereſt, rightly underſtood. For I am perſuaded that if this be wholly left out of the queſtion; and all regard to themſelves be excluded, ſo that men ſhall find that they are neither to reap profit nor pleaſure, nor honour, nor any advantage from the part they are to act, it is in vain to enter into argument
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with them. Their practice must be determined another way; and the passions of their hearts will easily hurry them, whithersoever they please. And here if men have any native goodness and probity of mind, they will feel within themselves the pleasure and honour of keeping strictly to those engagements, which the nature of human society layeth upon them; and for which alone they receive the supports and protection of it. They will have the reward within of a peaceful breast, undisturbed with the tumults of passion, pride, covetousness, or revenge. They will feel that it is truly speaking much more happy to themselves, to set bounds to their own desires and views, in conjunction with the ends of society, than to break through their obligations, to ruffle and discompose their breasts, merely for the sake of laying hold on every opportunity of adding for the present moment, either to their riches, or their power.

The difference is this, that they will not indeed have the satisfaction of gratifying every present humour, or inclination, or resentment; (if that can be called a satisfaction, which often brings so much private,

private, as well as public, evil along with it): but they will have the satisfaction, even as to themselves, of pursuing their present interest in a more steady and secure, as well as a more honourable way; and at the same time of transmitting down those blessings to their own posterity, which they enjoy themselves. Whereas every breach or violence, made upon the scheme of public good, hath appeared, in multitudes of instances, to have ended even in the temporal disadvantage, or ruin, of the persons themselves who have been tempted to join in it. So it may probably be always, because in its nature it tends to it: but it will certainly affect many hereafter, in whom they ought to think themselves nearly and deeply concerned.

If therefore men have any regard to inward peace and tranquillity; if they have any sense of contentment within, or security without; if they will consult their understanding, and not their passion about their interest; if they are not lost to all sense of the good of their own posterity; if they have not thrown off all regard to their reason, as well as all belief in God; they will think even their
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present interest, as well as their future reward, sufficiently consulted and secured by such a temper of mind, as will teach them to disdain to accept of the benefits of society, without adding to the happiness of it; and to pursue their own present good, always in conjunction with that of the public, to which they belong.

S E R M O N XI.

THE WISDOM OF CONSIDERING
OUR LATTER END.

DEUTERONOMY XXXII. 29.

*O that they were wise, that they understood
this, that they would consider their latter
end.*

WHEN we know of any remarkable change, that is going to happen in our circumstances, we are apt to dwell upon it in our thoughts; and though something may for a time divert us from considering it, we soon resume
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the meditation, and revolve it over and over in our minds. But one unavoidable change, of a most interesting nature, awaits us all, which we seldom consider, though nothing in the world has a better claim to our habitual attention. That we must shortly die, we are each of us as certain, as that ever we were born; and yet many of us could scarcely think less of dying, were we secure of enjoying an immortality upon earth. The prospect of a removal into another neighbourhood makes us anxious and thoughtful about it; but the assurance of a speedy removal into another world, engages only a rare and slight recollection.

Strange indeed! was it not so common, that a creature capable of forethought and reflection, who has so many symptoms of mortality within him, and such frequent warnings given him by the death of his neighbours, should meet his fate, almost as blind and unattentive to it as the brutes themselves. But we are so taken up with the business, pleasures, and amusements of the world, that we have scarce leisure to think of leaving it; or if we have leisure, we want inclination. Which of us careth to meditate
much

much upon his own dissolution, as absolutely certain, and in all probability very near? How many spend one day and week after another, not once reflecting, that the remainder of life is continually wasting; and that at the longest, a short succession of days and weeks must bring them to the grave! Most men are so far from taking pains to remember, that they industriously seek to escape or banish all sense of their mortality. If by some accident it forceth itself upon them, they flatter themselves that it is a remote event, and dismiss the consideration of it as unreasonable and premature. They hate and drive away the gloomy imagination which checks their licentiousness, damps their gaiety, and constrains them to be serious. They are so cowardly withal, that they dare not apply themselves in good earnest to meditate upon death. Their timorous minds recoil at the frightful idea, and find no repose till they are delivered from this disagreeable companion. They fly therefore into the hurry of business, the noise of company, or the gay circle of pleasure; glad if by any means they can divert their thoughts, and forget their mortality. Thus there is room

for applying to the generality of mankind that affectionate wish which the great lawgiver expressed concerning the Jews ; “ O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end.”

I shall endeavour, in what follows, to shew the wisdom and importance of attending to our mortality. And among all the precepts that were ever delivered in order to mend the heart, there is none of greater and more universal use, than this, that we be daily mindful of death. This single consideration, often renewed, and deeply impressed upon the mind, would moderate our passions, and make us diligent in acquiring the habits, and doing the works of piety and goodness. In prosperity it would preserve us from insolence, and in adversity from dejection of mind. We should not be so apt to insult and despise our inferiors, did we often reflect upon the common dust, wherein all distinction will soon be lost between us and the meanest of mortals.

One serious look towards the grave would be sufficient to abash our pride, to make us humble in the highest stations, and to extinguish all remains of contempt

contempt towards any of our fellow-creatures, how far soever they are placed below us. The thoughts of dying would enable us to enjoy good fortune with moderation. They would keep down all indecent and vain exultations, were we raised ever so high, and ever so suddenly. The grand house, the ample fortune, the walks and gardens, woods and plains, the outward pomp and ornaments of life, must all be left in a short time, and lost for ever. Who then would be transported beyond measure with the possession of these things? who would be too much elevated on account of any worldly enjoyments, if he considered, as he ought, that they must all in a few years terminate in death?

Meditations upon death would help to preserve our temper even and composed in every condition. Hence we might learn both to "rejoice as though we rejoiced not" in the day of prosperity, and to "weep as though we wept not" upon sorrowful occasions. The good man, while tost upon the sea of life, is never out of sight of land, and may comfort himself, whenever he pleases, by looking to the end of his toils and

forrows. Is he afflicted with bodily pain? he shall soon be delivered from the body, and along with it, from all its disorders. Is he mourning the loss of his friends? he shall be restored to the enjoyment of them in a happier world, never more to be separated from them. Death is a secure haven, in his course towards which, no accidents can retard him; where, as soon as he arrives, (and shortly he must) he shall not only be released from his troubles, but placed beyond all possibility and fear of affliction. Hither then let him frequently direct his views, that the prospect of their approaching period, may encourage and support him under his present calamities.

Thus by considering our latter end, we might keep even the balance of our minds, neither elevated with the gifts, nor sinking beneath the pressures of fortune. At the lively idea of death, all the passions subside, and leave the soul in a state of serious tranquillity. Envy dies away, resentment cools, and the fond admiration of worldly things decays and vanishes. We shall scarcely be disturbed, because others exceed us in wealth and grandeur, if we frequently recollect, that in a very
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little time, death will entirely abolish these distinctions, and reduce all men to the same equality in which they were born. The remembrance of death would also assist us in subduing our anger: both as it abates our pride, which gives the edge to injuries and affronts; and as it lessens in our eyes, the value of those things in which we are injured. When you are moved with indignation, says one upon any account, it will be of service, if you call to mind, that human life is momentary, and that it will not be long before we shall each of us be carried to the grave. Such meditations will contribute to stifle every ill-natured passion, and to work us into a mild placable humane temper.

Death, did we listen to its instructions, would shew us in the clearest light the vanity of human things; and teach us to look down upon them with a noble indifference. It demonstrates beyond all dispute, that whatever they may be in their own nature, they are momentary and perishing with regard to us; and that therefore it is madness to pursue them with vehemence and anxiety. The tomb with silent, but irresistible eloquence, re-

proves the folly of avarice and ambition.

But however opposite the sense of death may be to the covetous and the aspiring humour, it may perhaps be thought likely rather to promote, than discourage an inclination to indolence and pleasure. Our mortality, we know hath often been made an argument for a soft and luxurious life, and this maxim hath been embraced by many as just and rational; "let us eat and drink, for to morrow we die." The meaning of this exhortation must doubtless be; that we should enjoy the present in the best manner we can, because we are certain of nothing beyond it. Now though the advice expressed in these general terms, may be thought wise and good; yet the reason by which it is supported, is somewhat extraordinary. For what if we must not die to morrow? What if we are assured, we must never die? Would it not still be the wise part, to make the best of every fleeting moment? But to pass by this absurdity, the abovementioned maxim, as applied by the men of pleasure, to recommend a voluptuous life, goes upon two suppositions, which are equally false. First it supposes, that to eat and drink, is to
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make the best of the present time, considered by itself; and secondly, that death is the end of our existence. Whereas sensual gratifications are in fact the meanest and the most worthless, of which our nature is capable; and beyond all comparison inferior to the pleasures that flow from virtue and religion. And therefore, whether we must die to morrow, or not die at all, it is folly to waste in gratifying our senses, those moments which we may employ to much better advantage in improving our minds, and performing the offices of piety and virtue. Thus even they, who regard death as the final period of their being, can draw from thence no just argument in favour of licentiousness.

But death is not the end; it is only a change in the manner of our existence; a separation of soul and body; the former of which will continue, when the latter is mouldered into dust. And considered in this light, so far is death from recommending the pursuit of bodily pleasure, that it pleads against it no less earnestly, than against the pursuits of honour and wealth. Your soul must shortly be divided from this body, and exist, for a

time at least, apart by herself. Now if you cherish in her an affection towards it, and those pleasures which depend upon it, she will be torn from it at last with difficulty and reluctance; and remain miserable in her state of separation: regretting the loss of what she had principally valued, and wishing in vain to be again restored to the enjoyment of it. You should therefore be daily weaning her from a fondness for the body, and be loosening the bonds, which hold them together; that being thus prepared, she may pass through the approaching dissolution willingly and with ease: and not be tormented afterwards with vain desires of re-union, which it will not be in her power to accomplish.

The strongest cement, which binds the spiritual to the earthly part, is the lust of sensual gratifications; and this lust may be strengthened by habits of indulgence to such a degree, that the mind shall be altogether impatient and restless, if deprived for any long season of its wonted enjoyments. And since we can scarce doubt, but that after its departure, the spirit still retains the same habits and affections, it had before; how wretched must

must be the condition of that soul, which, upon leaving the body, finds she is, and for ever shall be incapable of those sensations, in which alone she places all her happiness? Therefore the consideration of death, rightly understood, is so far from countenancing a voluptuous life; that it will excite every wise man to die daily: that is, to disengage himself, as as much as may be, from the body and its pleasures; that when he cannot enjoy, he may not want them.

An habitual attention to our latter end would contribute, not only to wean our affections from the things of time and sense, but also to fix them upon objects which are spiritual and eternal. As soon as the connexion between the mind and body is dissolved, it is plain the soul can be susceptible of no enjoyments, but what are of a purely spiritual nature. Its happiness in that disembodied state, so far as we can describe it, will arise from the love of God; from the consciousness of a growing resemblance to him; from the admiration of his works and perfections; from enlarging and satisfying views of truth; and from the exercise of benevolence and mutual friendship with

good beings. If then we are not willing our happiness should terminate with the present life, it concerns us to cultivate a relish for these noble entertainments; for though we should be translated into heaven when we die, if we die without any taste for its refined satisfactions, we cannot be happy in heaven itself.

I may seem to wander beyond my subject, but in reality it is scarcely possible to meditate upon death without entering into its momentous consequences. While we view, in the most careless manner, the short passage between this and the other world, we cannot forbear to glance upon the scene which lies beyond it; a scene, that presents to us the greatest and most interesting realities, which the human mind is capable of considering; and this above all shews the importance of an attention to our latter end. It is not only edifying in itself, but by a natural, and almost necessary train of thought, leads us into reflections upon other subjects, in the highest degree useful and important. It guides the imagination forward into eternity; makes an hereafter, as it were, present to the mind; awakens the apprehension of a future judgment; and gives the
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the rewards and punishments of the world to come, their full weight and impression upon us. Thus it will suggest to us, the most powerful motives to a godly life; and excite us by a patient continuance in well-doing, to seek for glory, honour, and immortality.

Did we place death habitually before our eyes, it would engage us to apply ourselves with all our might to the proper business of life, and to pursue it without intermission. It would represent the extreme folly and danger of delays; warning us, that the present season alone is ours; that if we count upon to morrow, we depend upon an absolute uncertainty; and that while we stand trifling, and only framing distant purposes, opportunity may slip out of our hands and be lost, beyond the possibility of being retrieved. Hence we should be admonished to use our time, as it comes, to the best purpose, in improving our minds, and serving our generation; not wasting the day-light of life in sloth and impertinencies; -but working while it is called to-day, because the night is at hand, in which no man can work.

What has been said may suffice to shew

the wisdom and importance of "considering our latter end."

You may object, that the idea of death is disagreeable and shocking; that it will damp our spirits, and render us indisposed for the gay amusements and pleasures of the world. Now if you mean by this, that it will check our levity, and give our thoughts a more serious turn, I acknowledge it will; but then I ask, supposing it does, where will be the harm? I am so far from esteeming this a bad circumstance, that I count it among the advantages which flow from a sense of our mortality. But will it not disturb our peace, and fill us with fearful apprehensions? If so, where is the prudence of dwelling so much upon it? Would it not be wiser to follow the common practice, and keep it out of our thoughts as much as we can? Is it not better blindly to meet our fate, like the brutes, than fixing our eyes constantly upon death, to live in continual solicitude? To this it might be a sufficient reply; that since meditations upon death, are so profitable to us, though they may be attended with some uneasiness, it would be worth our while to bear the pain, for the sake of the

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the benefits arising from them. But this matter deserves to be considered a little more fully.

We might make the idea of death easy and familiar, by daily reflecting upon our latter end. The awe, which it naturally strikes upon the mind, will wear off in proportion, as we encrease our intimacy with it. But instead of cultivating this acquaintance, we industriously avoid it; and the surprise will add to the horror of its appearance, whenever it constrains, as sometimes it will constrain our attention. There are, we know, certain occasions, on which it is impossible for us to shun the remembrance of death. There are certain seasons of life, when it will have our attention, our principal attention, whether we will or no. Now there is but one way to escape an alarm upon such occasions, and that is, daily to meditate upon death, and prepare ourselves for it through the whole of life. The more we consider it, the less will it disturb us; whereas if the thought is unusual and strange, the uncommonness of it, will render it the more shocking, when it is forced upon us by accident.

If you are not prepared for death, you
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have most need of all to be mindful of it; that hence you may be warned to get yourself ready. If you are prepared, you have no reason to be distressed at the prospect of dying. For to a good man, what is there so formidable in death? Is it the act of dying? For aught we know, it may be attended with no extraordinary pain; or if it be painful, it is over in an instant. Shall he then tremble at the consequences of death? These to him are far from being dreadful; they are more than comfortable; they are joyful and glorious! Can it be so dismal to reflect, that he is hastening towards the final period of his affliction; which if they were to have no period, would be dismal indeed? Is there any thing so uncomfortable in the fore-sight of a speedy removal out of a world, which abounds with pain and guilt, and folly, into a state of eternal rest, and unspeakable felicity? Shall not the lively expectation of such an event, support him under the evils of life, and enable him to maintain an uniform serenity? It will not only not injure his tranquillity, but secure it from being injured by other accidents. It will not ruffle, but calm his temper. Instead of disturbing,

ing, it will establish his peace. Instead of impairing, it will greatly promote his good humour and cheerfulness. It will supply him with a fund of constant joy, and keep him in the best disposition for relishing the harmless pleasures and amusements of life. We should therefore often consider our latter end, because this exercise, at the same time that it improves the mind, may also contribute to its cheerfulness and comfort.

Upon the whole, such is our forgetfulness of death, and such the wisdom of attending to it, that if there was a voice, which might be heard through the whole earth, it would be well employed in daily admonishing the sons of men; "Remember you are mortal." Or if we had each of us a guardian angel, whose office it should be, frequently to whisper in our ears this important truth, it might be of infinite service to us. God has given us understanding for our guardian angel, which attending to the voice of universal nature, and learning from thence, that it is appointed for us and for all men once to die, may supply the want of other monitors. Let us willingly receive its suggestions. Let us consider our own death,
as

as a certain event ; as in all probability very near ; as impossible to lie at any great distance. Through all our pursuits, business, and amusements, let us carry along with us the sense of our mortality. Let us often revive it out of choice ; and when it comes by accident, let us not seek to drive it away, as an impertinent intruder, but entertain and cherish it as a welcome guest.

We should regard all the pains and disorders of our body, as so many tendencies towards a dissolution ; as so many symptoms of its near approach. When we see others falling on every side of us, it should always make one of our inmost thoughts, that for aught we know, our turn may be next. When we follow the corps of a friend or a neighbour to its long home, we should not suffer the sentiments to escape us, that we ourselves must shortly be carried the same way. We should frequently consider what numbers of those who came along with us or followed us into life, are gone out of it already ; many of which were more likely to have been our survivors, than we theirs. We live in a world where every thing is dying around us ; plants
and

and trees, animals and men. We can scarce open our eyes, but we meet with some object or another, which points to the tomb, and which if we are not extremely stupid, will afford us a hint of our own mortality. The flowers of the field, the shadows which glide over the plains, the vapour which appears, and then immediately vanishes, present us with lively emblems of the shortness of human life. All the productions both of art and nature, the impregnable edifice, the everlasting hills, as they are called, and the great globe itself, are tending to decay and dissolution. As for the generations of men, who are very properly distinguished by the name of mortals, they are an easy prey to devouring time, and follow one another in quick succession.

In this world of death, as it would be great stupidity to forget our latter end, so it were madness to remember it, and at the same time neglect to prepare for it. The best preparation for death is a virtuous temper, and a good life. When once you are furnished with these qualifications, you may view it approaching towards you with a calm and constant mind,
free

free from any timorous, unmanly solicitude.

S E R M O N XII.

THE PRESENT REWARDS OF BENEFICENCE.

JOB XXIX. 11, 12, 13.

*When the ear heard me, then it blessed me;
and when the eye saw me, it gave witness
to me. Because I delivered the poor that
cried, and the fatherless, and him that
had none to help him. The blessing of him
that was ready to perish came upon me,
and I caused the widow's heart to sing
for joy.*

IT is a natural kind of indulgence to
any present sorrow, which affects and
disquiets us, to call back to our view the
many

many blessings we have formerly enjoyed, and of which, as is probable, this change of situation has taught us the true value.

Thus we find Job, in the beginning of this chapter, crying out, " Oh that I
" were as in months past, as in the
" days when God preserved me ! When
" his candle shined upon my head, and
" when by his light I walked through
" darkness : when the Almighty was yet
" with me, when my children were about
" me : when I washed my steps with
" butter, and the rock poured me out
" rivers of oil : when I went out to the
" gate through the city, when I prepared my seat in the street ; the young men
" saw me, and hid themselves, and the
" aged arose, and stood up : the princes
" refrained talking, and laid their hand
" on their mouth : the nobles held their
" peace, and their tongue cleaved to the
" roof of their mouth."

But beside that it is common with the afflicted thus to sooth, and indulge their present sorrows ; it is reasonable to conclude, that Job had a particular point in view in this chapter : in the twenty-second we meet with Eliphaz thus accusing him ;

him; "is not thy wickedness great, and
"thine iniquities infinite? For thou hast
"taken a pledge from thy brother for
"nought, and stripped the naked of
"their cloathing: Thou hast not given
"water to the weary to drink, and thou
"hast with-holden bread from the hun-
"gry: Thou hast sent widows away
"empty, and the arms of the fatherless
"have been broken."

Against so heavy, and withal so ground-
less an imputation, Job makes his de-
fence in my text, and the following pas-
sages. So far was he from being the un-
merciful, oppressive person, which Eli-
phaz had been describing, that it had
been his constant employment to relieve
misery, and to redress wrongs. In his
judicial capacity he had always paid the
strictest regard to justice and truth: he
was "a father to the poor," and felt such
a compassion and tenderness for them,
that the cause which "he knew not, he
searched out:" and as a consequence of
this humanity and uncorruptness, "they
"waited for him, as for the rain, and
"they opened their mouth wide, as for
"the latter rain:" the ear would never
have blessed the voice of the oppress-
for ;"

for; nor would the eye have given witness to injustice and cruelty: the poor never would have waited with impatience for an oppressor, nor could his presence and influence be compared to the refreshment of the latter rain. So easy was it to confute this calumny of Eliphaz, from its utter inconsistency with the several facts here related, for the truth of which he appeals to a cloud of witnesses.

The occasion of these words being thus opened to you, you will easily perceive that they very naturally suggest to us the following observations.

That a benevolent and merciful disposition, which shews itself in acts of kindness and relief, gives us the surest claim to the love and esteem of mankind.

That all acts and offices of this nature are attended with present pleasure and satisfaction. And,

That, beside this present pleasure and satisfaction, they “lay up in store for us” “a good foundation” of both “against the time to come.”

The first observation is, That a benevolent and merciful disposition, which shews itself in acts of kindness and relief, gives

gives us the surest claim to the love and esteem of mankind.

We shall soon discover the foundation and justness of this observation, by considering, that those virtuous dispositions, and actions in which mankind have the greatest interest, and from which they receive most benefit, will naturally engage the largest share of their love and esteem.

The man, who complies with the strictest rules of temperance, who is arrived at that happy state of mind, that with regard to all his gratifications, reason and religion are duly heard, is no doubt, an object that deserves the greatest regard and attention; and such as a reasonable mind cannot survey without the highest approbation: and yet it must be allowed, that mankind is affected in a very different manner, and the impressions are much weaker, upon this occasion, than they are, when we contemplate that character which goes about doing good, and which is industrious in finding out and relieving the miserable.

In the former instance, it is an agreeable, as well as useful employment, for the mind to consider the real happiness of acting under the influence of reason and religion;

religion; to observe what a consistency of conduct, and steadiness in virtue they inspire: these considerations will tend to raise our admiration, and should effectually excite a desire to be like him: but in the latter instance there is something, which not only engages our notice, but our hearts; it not only furnishes out an agreeable and entertaining speculation, but we taste, as well as see, the goodness which we admire. The mind and judgment are not only employed and engaged in surveying and approving such a character; but its usefulness and beauty excites, and even warms the affections.

Agreeably to what I have been observing, it is remarkably, that the greatest and most distinguishing talents cannot command this love and esteem, but in proportion as they are more or less useful to mankind: they will be apt to attract the eyes of men, and the persons who are possessed of them, will probably be gazed at. The effect which they have upon the world, is like that of a comet, or any other extraordinary appearance which serves to raise our admiration or astonishment: whereas the character in my
text

text excites and warms our affections, and as I have remarked, irresistibly makes its way into our hearts.

It should be considered likewise by those who enjoy them, that there is something invidious in the possession of great abilities of mind or fortune; and that there is no circumstance which so effectually prevents the envy they are apt to raise, as a just and proper use of them: no one will repine at that abundance, which is perpetually adding to the scanty portion of others; he will rather consider it, as a refuge for himself in time of need. No man can be envious or grieved at his skill or power to persuade, who is ready to exert them in pleading the cause of the injured and oppressed: no one surely can think it matter of just discontent, that another is blessed with greater sagacity and strength of mind, when he can always have recourse to them under any difficulties. In a word, no one will complain that nature or Providence has been too bountiful to him, who makes this right use of the gifts of both. By this means, you see we may prevent the guilt of others, as well as our own; nay we may not only prevent the guilt of envy,

but dispose them even to be thankful for what we enjoy. But what was the practice of our great example? To bind up “the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, to give unto them that mourn, beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;” to listen to the cries and importunity of every afflicted object, and to make this most gracious and engaging reply, “what wilt thou, that I shall do for thee?” It was by this means that he, who was “the desire of all nations,” before he appeared among us, was the delight of mankind, when he appeared: his doctrine and his miracles convinced their understandings; but it was his mercy and goodness, and because they saw he was mighty to save, which gave him possession of their hearts. To this cause it may probably be ascribed, that the Jews did not sooner attempt to “lay hold on him, because they feared the people,” whose inclinations he had captivated and won by a life of pity and condescension, and who could not therefore but consider themselves very nearly interested in what befel

befel fuch a friend and lover of mankind.

But besides that love and esteem which we are fure to gain by a benevolent and merciful difpofition, we are further invited to fuch actions, as proceed from it, by the prefent pleafure and fatisfaction which attends them.

“ When the good Samaritan went to
“ the wounded ftranger and bound up his
“ wounds, pouring in oil and wine ;”
who can fay, that the wounded perfon did not impart more comfort than he received ? That relief which with regard to the latter, was only a mitigation of pain, gave the former the moft exquisite pleafure: every ftep which he took in the progrefs of this moft engaging inftance of humanity, improved and heightened his own gratification. If he had not run through this feries and fucceffion of good offices, his pleafure would not have been fo entire, and the complacency and fatisfaction resulting from well-doing would have been lefs fenfible and quick: but when his compaffion had thus finifhed its work, his joy was full.

Or fuppofe ye, that the father in the parable, went without his fhare of delight, and even tranfport in receiving a fon who

had strayed from his bosom? How think ye? Did not his heart burn within him, when he saw that change, which he had so impatiently waited for; and his son as it is there well expressed, coming to himself? When he saw him thus disgusted at his former pursuits, and preferring, upon the fullest conviction, the path of religion and virtue, it is not easy to conceive, much less express, the transport of the father.

The same way of reasoning will appear to be equally true and just, if we go through the several instances of doing good contained in my text. Can there be a greater or more sincere pleasure, than to deliver the poor that cries from that distress or oppression, which is too strong for him; to “break his bonds asunder, to cast away his cords from him,” and afford him a place of refuge, where he may “no more hear the voice of the oppressor.”

Or what employment can yield more true delight, more unmixed satisfaction, than to endeavour to imitate the great pattern of all perfection, in that most amiable character, of being a “father of the fatherless?”

What

What sound can be more grateful to our ears, or make sweeter "melody in our hearts," than "the blessing of him who was ready to perish," but brought back by our care and tenderness to life and comfort?

Or lastly; Whither shall we go, and find an entertainment for a reasonable being, who knows and considers his own situation, and the innumerable accidents and evils to which it is exposed, equal to that of "making the widow's heart," distracted with cares, and "pierced through" with many sorrows, to sing for joy; of "having pity on her fatherless children," of entering into her concern and anxiety for their safety and success, and of beholding them at last, through our assistance and advice, the solace of her misfortunes, and the support of her age? These are the true joys, if any such are to be found on earth!

There is something in compassion so interwoven with, and agreeable to our nature, that we offer a violence to ourselves, when we resist its calls, and deny its requests: it is so natural to man, that it takes its name from him, and is called humanity: it is so essential a part of him

that the want of it degrades him from the order of beings to which he belongs. The bare contemplation and recital of acts of true compassion affects the heart in the most agreeable and interesting manner; how great, how exquisite then must the pleasure be of going, and doing likewise!

But besides that present pleasure and satisfaction, which attends a benevolent and merciful disposition, there is this farther motive strongly to recommend it, that "it lays up in store for us a good foundation" of both "against the time to come."

It is a distinguishing part of our character, as men, that we can recall, and review our past actions: the most thoughtless and inconsiderate will sometimes find himself thus employed, though it seems to be the great business of his life to guard against such employment.

If this reflection is a just one, it will follow from it, that those actions should be preferred and delighted in by a reasonable mind, which can best bear a review; and that we should with the greatest care abstain from those, the remembrance of which will be bitter to us. It should
always

always be considered by us, when we are moved or sollicitated to any action, not only in what light it appears to us at present, but how it will appear hereafter, when the mind will survey it with greater freedom and impartiality; when the present motive or temptation, which had so much influence in determining us, will disappear, and consequently when we shall view the action abstractedly, and in itself.

In general, this may be laid down as a certain truth, that there can be no true pleasure to a reasonable mind in reflecting upon any advantages which we have enjoyed, but in proportion as we have made the right use of them. This consideration must fix the degrees of our complacency and satisfaction in such reflections; and where this is wanting, they will always end in accusation and remorse: where this is not the case, so far shall we be from feeling any satisfaction in looking back upon those advantages which we have enjoyed, that there will be a peculiar bitterness in the remembrance, that we have received our good things. Accordingly we find Job drawing all his consolation from the right use of those

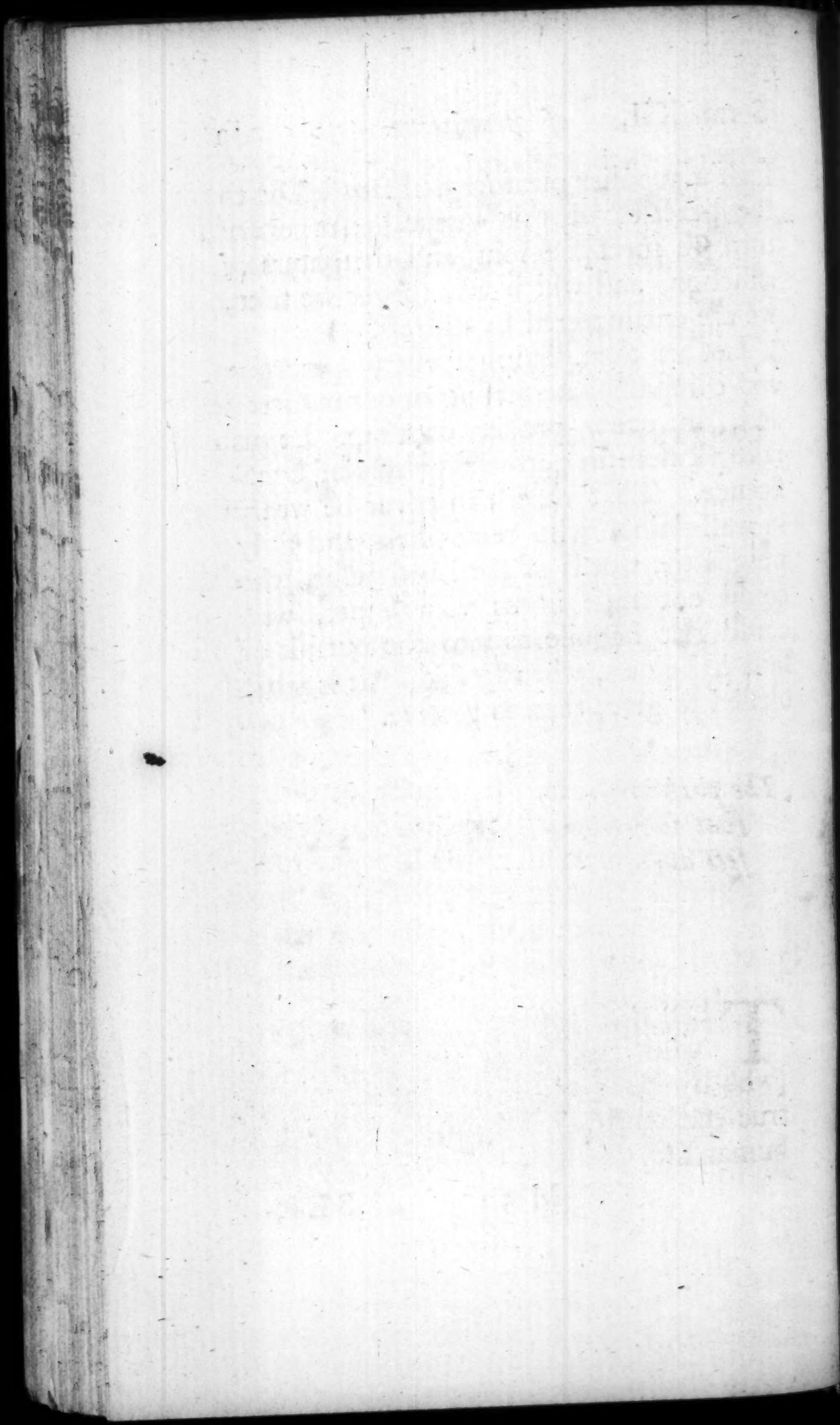
blessing which he had enjoyed ; not pleasing himself with the bare thought, that he had possessed such and such honours, but that while they were in his possession they had been instrumental to the safety, and happiness of mankind : and the same reflection must be every man's support in the day of trial.

Among those actions which can best bear reflection, and yield us, upon a review the truest pleasure, works of real mercy and compassion seem to claim the first place. The "merciful man does good to his own soul," by laying in such a fund of agreeable reflections, as may come in to his relief, under any of the disappointments and evils of this life. These reflections will bear him company in solitude, they will administer ease in sickness, and comfort in affliction ; they will speak peace and hope to a troubled and dejected mind, and will help him to disarm even the king of terrors.

And when we consider what frequent calls there are for our compassion, we cannot but see how wisely it is contrived, that there should be so many motives to excite and raise it ; and how indulgent the Author of our nature is in annexing
such

such a peculiar pleasure and satisfaction to the practice of this virtue. At every turn we meet the sons and daughters of affliction, and which way soever we take, we are encountered by distress.

Let us then, indulge every generous and compassionate feeling of our natures; and, on every proper occasion, let us take pleasure in performing acts of beneficence. That man can never be weary in well-doing, who remembers and duly weighs the words of the Lord Jesus, who could not raise in us vain hopes, who could not beguile us into the pursuit of false happiness, when he said, "it is more blessed to give, than to receive."



S E R M O N XIII.

CONTINUAL PROGRESS IN VIRTUE
RECOMMENDED.

PROVERBS IV. 18.

*The path of the just is as the shining light;
that shineth more and more unto the per-
fect day.*

THERE are many, and some too
who call themselves philosophers,
(who by the way never understood the
true end of living,) that have represented
human life, as a dull business not worth a
M 6 man's

man's care; where the same things come over and over again; "like a tale that is told:" which however entertaining it may appear while it is new; yet by frequent repetitions, at last becomes perfectly tedious and insipid. The consequence of which has been, that many viewing the picture in this disagreeable light, have been inclined to throw off all concern about it; any farther than to arrive at a secure indolence of body, and a peaceful tranquillity, or rather insensibility of mind; to shut out all reflexion any farther than just to remedy or remove such inconveniences, as the common accidents of life may occasionally produce: and others, loathing the same viands so often served up, or fretted and soured by the many crosses and calamities intailed upon this imperfect state, have as ridiculously as rashly, put an end to their being.

And true it is, that the lives of too many have been but one barren circle, to which they have been as it were enchanted. But though many may have made life a dull round of insignificant actions, yet no man had ever occasion to make it so. It is so indeed to brutes, which soon arrive
at

at that pitch of perfection which is allotted to their nature: where they must stop short, without a possibility of going any farther. Sense which is the highest natural power they have, moves in a narrow sphere; its objects are in comparison few; and moreover dull and gross: and therefore not only come more quickly round, but become more languid and dull in every revolution. But man is endued with nobler faculties, and presented with nobler objects whereon to exercise and employ them. The contemplation of all moral and divine truths to engage his understanding: the love of the Creator, and all the beauties of the natural and moral world to attract and captivate his affections: the power, wisdom, and goodness of God manifested in the whole extent of the creation, to exalt his admiration, and call forth all his praise. The opportunities of all good actions to produce the pleasures of virtue and a good conscience. Nothing can bound the noble range of reason, ever improving, and ever improveable; nothing can abate the ardor of the affections, which are placed upon the fountain and foundation of all love, of all beauty and harmony: nothing

thing can diminish the admiration of a universe, where the very minutest parts are above the highest human comprehension: nothing can deaden the pleasures of virtue and a good conscience, which, the more they are tasted, the more they are desirable. Here is a noble path for a rational creature to travel in: his continued advancement in it, his daily improvement in knowledge, virtue and goodness, will constitute his highest perfection here, and terminate in a perfect consummation of endless bliss and glory: "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

If we trace the progress of the human mind from the first dawnings of sense and reason, we may see from what small beginnings it acquires a prodigious store of intellectual knowledge. The view fills us with admiration, and we are naturally led to wish, nay, to make it the sum of our wishes, that we could be able to traverse those regions of science, whereof some noble geniuses have made themselves masters: but though we admire, we need not complain. It has indeed pleased the all-wise Governor of the world

world to make a great distinction in the original frame of human souls, with respect to the intellectual powers: a provision absolutely necessary for answering the purposes of civil government, where a subordination is necessarily implied; for so much wisdom will always produce so much power. But whether we may always observe it or no, our Saviour's command to his disciples is virtually fulfilled in every community: "He that is the greatest among you, let him be your servant." If the men who are blessed with distinguished abilities, make a proper use of them, (and otherwise they need not be envied) they are really increasing the measure of the public good; and, in that, doing service to the meanest individual: and therefore reputation and esteem are but a due acknowledgment for their good offices. But to expect or desire honour from men is but a low ambition. Let us try to recommend ourselves to the approbation of Him, whose "judgment is not as man's judgment." The very best part of knowledge is knowing how to discharge rightly our duty to God; and therefore the performance of that duty must still be of higher estimation.

tion. And in this mankind are more upon an equal footing. The moral powers, like the natural perfections of the body, are more equally distributed; and in them there is as large a field laid open for our advancement towards perfection, as there is in the intellectual.

It is true, we may have unhappily struck into a wrong path, and be wandering in the ways of wickedness: but, by a serious recollection, and application to Divine Mercy, we may yet find a "lamp to our feet, and a light unto our paths." Our evil habits, those cords that hold us in captivity to sin, though we may not be able at once to cast them away from us, yet we may insensibly weaken, and at last break asunder, by gradually unravelling the smaller lines of their contexture. Our inclinations, that may have taken a wrong bent, we may counteract, and by degrees recover to their original rectitude. Where our nature favours a particular virtue, there we may second it, and graft upon it; under the branches whereof other hopeful seeds may take root, spring up, and prosper. After this we may still be
looking

looking into the culture of the soul, and studying daily improvements, by calling forth virtues, or several degrees of virtue, that have not yet made their appearance, and by cherishing and bringing to perfection those that have. Thus will our minds resemble those fruit-trees, in which, while several of the productions are come to maturity, others are blossoming, and giving promises of reaching the same degrees of excellence.

No man knows what he can do, till he is firmly resolved to do whatever he can. When men have thought themselves obliged to set about any business in good earnest, they have done that which their indolence made them suppose impossible. There are several abilities unknown to the possessors, which lie hid in the mind for want of an occasion to call them forth.

We have the same natural powers, and the same gracious aids for preserving and improving our virtues, as we had originally for attaining them: What then should restrain or hinder our continual progress? Does the difficulty lie in the thing itself? Is it a harder task to continue and grow more perfect in a
habit

habit of virtue, than it is at first to acquire such habit? On the contrary, it has always been presumed, and always allowed, that whatever difficulties and discouragements may attend our first entrance on the paths of virtue, yet on pursuing our journey we find the prospect more chearful and inviting every step we take: whatever mixtures of vice may debase the first compositions of virtue, yet each repetition of good actions, like the repeated essays of the refiner, separates the dross, and leaves the substance more pure. However the soul, at its first rising from the ground, may flutter and mount heavily; yet, when once it is thoroughly upon the wing, it flies along with an easy, vigorous, and continued motion; and, in allusion to the words of the text, though the first dawn of religion upon the souls of men may be but as the wings of the morning, spreading themselves upon the mountains, yet it gradually attains to a meridian altitude.

So far then ought we to be from considering this life as a dull, confined round of the same insignificant trifles, that we ought to look upon it as an indefinite line; wherein every step we take is, or ought

ought to be, an important and valuable advance in goodness: an addition to that number of good actions, whose sum will render our happiness the more exalted and complete. It will carry us on till we become here on earth little lower than the angels; and by a natural and easy transition, shall be made equal to them in heaven: which leads me

To offer some reasons and considerations to engage us in such a practice.

And first, let it be considered, that this progressive state is our duty. In this view we may observe, that the scriptures have not determined what precise quantity of goodness, neither more nor less, will intitle us to the favour of God; and by that, to the inheritance that fadeth not away: it being their design to make men not just so far virtuous, and no farther; but to make them as virtuous and pious as possible. Accordingly we are commanded to “grow in grace, to go on to perfection, to be perfect, even as our Father which is in heaven is perfect; to be holy as he is holy; merciful, as he is merciful.” The degrees indeed of these perfections we shall never be able fully

fully to reach, nor is it the intention of the command that we should: but it is in our power to make a constant and continued progress in the kinds of these perfections; and thence arises our obligation to advance in the degrees as far as the sum of our faculties, exercised and improved to the utmost, can carry us. Truth, justice, mercy, goodness, and holiness are essentially and eternally the same in their own nature. And since God hath been pleased to create us in his own image, by enduing us with reason, and thereby making us capable of exercising these his own attributes, which in a lower degree he hath graciously communicated to us; so by our diligent improvement in them, by beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, we are renewed more intimately into that image; we attain to a nearer resemblance of his divine nature. The rule is perfect, that scope might be given to the most exalted virtue; but the absolute perfection of it unattainable, that "he that glorieth may glory in the Lord." Our condemnation will not lie in this, that we did not exactly transcribe the original; but that we did not make the copy so complete as
was

was in our power. The best conviction and assurance then, that we can have of truly discharging our duty, is the evidence of this progress in our christian course.

It is not uncommon indeed to hear some men express themselves in such terms of indifference about their religious conduct, as if it were the least concern they had in the world; to hear them make a jest of the high strains of piety and goodness which they observe in others, and ludicrously, or rather profanely declare, they do not pretend to be such saints; they should be content with the lowest place in heaven. Happy, no doubt, will he be, who, by a faithful discharge of his duty to the utmost of his power, shall obtain a place in the lowest of the heavenly mansions: but for men, with an air of presumption, to pretend to cut out for themselves just such a portion of duty as they think will entitle them to an inestimable reward; and, like wary dealers, put themselves to no more expence than what they judge will be barely necessary to purchase that pearl to which the kingdom of heaven is compared: this is a covetousness which is idolatry: it is sacrificing the riches of
God's

God's goodness, their natural and spiritual powers, to their own indolence and wantonness. Had he, to whom were committed five talents in the parable, gained no more than he to whom two only were committed, can we think he would have merited the title of "a good and faithful servant?" No, of "a wicked and slothful servant;" slothful, in not making the most of them; wicked, in resolving not to make the most of them. In short, they who are blessed with the highest powers, whether intellectual, moral, or spiritual, are under a strict obligation to employ them in all the offices of goodness, and in degrees proportionable to those powers. The command given by St. Paul to Timothy, concerning those who have worldly riches, virtually extends to them; and under the same penalty, the forfeiture of their salvation; "Charge them, that they be rich in good works."

If any man thinks himself already as virtuous and good as he needs to be; it is a certain sign, he has not yet arrived at any eminence in virtue. For from thence, as from a rising ground, the prospect would enlarge upon him, and enable

enable him to descry vastly distant tracts, to which the small space that he had already measured bore no proportion. Few men will pretend to have made equal advances with St. Paul towards perfection; he being one of those persons, that, whatever they do, do it "with all their soul," and "with all their strength:" yet he was far from thinking that he had finished his work, or that he might remit any thing of his endeavours. On the contrary, we find him imitating the alacrity of those who run in a race; who do not so much consider what quantity of ground they have already cleared, as how much still remains, to call forth their strength and agility. "Not," says he, "as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: But I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which I also am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: But this one thing I do; forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press towards the mark," (or goal) "for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." And it is remarkable,

markable, that he urges the imitation of this his example, not only to those of the Philippians, who were newly entered into the Christian profession, and consequently can be supposed to have made but slender improvements in it; but, "Let us," says he, "as many as are perfect, be thus minded."

We see then how much it is the duty of the very best of us to be always improving in goodness: and we may venture to pronounce the state of that man to be dangerous, and that he will never arrive at heaven, who sits down, either under a lazy and affected despondency of being able to proceed no farther; or under a vain and impious presumption of having already gone far enough.

A second consideration arises from the advantages we shall reap from the progressive state. And here we may observe, that it will supersede the trust and confidence which too many are apt to repose in repentance: whereon, it is to be feared, a much greater stress is laid than it will be able to bear. No doubt can be made but christians, by the help of a good education, and early impressions of religion upon their minds, may live free
from

from the habits of all sin, and from every such single act of it as is gross and enormous. And after men have indulged themselves in vicious liberties, with a view of making repentance their refuge; it may be questioned, whether the most sincere repentance will not be such as they may have reason to repent of. The wound in their conscience may be healed in some sort, but it will always resemble the case of other wounds; where there is never such an union and incorporation as there was in the original composition.

Now nothing will more effectually prevent any danger of this kind (and this is the least danger that attends a reliance on repentance) than being actuated by those more generous principles which accompany the progressive state. If men form such faint resolutions of perseverance in their duty, as to leave some secret reserve for the admission of sin, it is more than probable they will soon have occasion for such an expedient: when our actions spring from mean motives, it is no wonder if they are confined within narrow limits, and conclude in inglorious achievements. But when the fear of pu-

nishment becomes but a subordinate incentive to moral attainments, and the love of virtue takes the lead in our inclinations ; when our duty is not performed with the heartless thought of its being our duty, but when it becomes a free-will offering, and presents itself as a kind of temptation to our desires ; when the pleasure we have experienced from the progress we have made, adds life and vigour to our farther pursuits ; when we are not driven forwards by the rebukes of an evil conscience, but led on by the acclamation and applause of a good one ; then will the soul be conscious of her innate greatness and dignity, and we shall be so far from sinking into the dregs of vice, that, as a philosopher said of his master, we shall almost blush to find ourselves in the body.

And as the progressive state is the best means for bringing us to a uniform and unreserved obedience ; so it is the best, if not the only security for our perseverance in it. It is not allowed us, in this unstable condition of things, to arrive at such a situation as we may expect to enjoy without any farther care or concern. Like an ar-

row

row shot up into the air, if we do not continue to ascend higher in the scale of moral and religious duties, we shall soon descend to something below them. The mind then is to be kept continually upon the stretch, our attention excited, and our affections enlivened by divine contemplations; our resolutions enforced by the view of higher advantages, our good habits farther strengthened and confirmed by the frequent exercise of good actions. We are, as it were, sailing against the wind; and if we remit any thing of our strength or activity, so as not to proceed, we must of course be driven back. The faculties of the mind, as well as the members of the body, by frequent use, gain a kind of mechanic ease and readiness; and by remission and disuse, abate of their skill and aptness in the performance. By intermitting our converse with things of a spiritual nature, we lose our taste and relish for them; a sort of indisposition is bred in the soul, the parent of a vitiated and depraved appetite. And hence it comes to pass, that the lives of most men take their turns, like the sea, of an alternate ebbing and flowing; whereas they ought to resemble the course of a river,

which is receiving perpetual ſupplies : which at the ſame time that they augment its ſtreams, add weight to its flow, till it finally terminates in the ocean. Our virtue ſhould not be like a meteor, which appeareth for a very little time and then vaniſheth, but like the ſhining light which ſhineth more and more unto the perfect day.

If we are perſuaded of the truth of the doctrine that has been advanced, what ſhall we think of the ſtate of thoſe men, who are purſuing a courſe of life in direct oppoſition to it; who inſtead of daily proceeding in all virtue and godlineſs, are daily adding to the number and malignity of their ſins? What can we think indeed, but that it “ had been better for “ them not to have known the way of “ righteouſneſs, than after they have “ known it, to turn from the holy com- “ mandment delivered unto them.” Let their danger ſuggeſt to us the means of our own ſecurity : and let us not entertain a mean opinion of the power which chriſtianity has to reform the world, from the ſmall effects that we find it has on the minds of but too many. Let us conſider what our religion can do by what we know

know in fact it has done. It was the high commendation of an exemplary Roman, that while he lived in the very dregs and corruption of his own republic, he formed his manners by the model of one that was accounted the most perfect: let it be ours to keep continually in our eye the pattern which the primitive christians have left us; and by copying after it, approve ourselves blameless and harmless, “the Sons of God without rebuke in the
“midst of a perverse generation, among
“whom let us shine as lights in the world.”

To conclude; Since it has pleased our Creator to constitute our frame in such a manner, that we advance gradually to the perfect use of reason: a faculty whose increase we are for a long time as insensible of, as we are of the increase of our stature; we may from hence deduce a good argument to persuade us, that the soul in a future state will not stop short at any certain period of happiness; but that she will continually enlarge her intellectual powers, and augment her capacities; purify her desires, and inflame her affections; receive new accessions of bliss and glory, and thereby make perpetual approaches to-

wards the fountain of all perfection. In this, we may well presume, will consist the happiness of those faithful servants, who shall be found to have done their master's will here on earth. And a more pleasing consideration cannot offer itself to the mind of man. Ought we not therefore to conclude, that during the intermediate interval, in order to render the whole of our existence uniform, the soul, by parity of reason, should preserve the same tenor of improvement? Let us then consider how far we are advanced in the path of life, and how far we have made it the path of the just. Let us endeavour to preserve such an uniform obedience in our lives, that they may know no variety but in their increase towards perfection: and as we are daily growing nearer to eternity, God grant that we may be more and more prepared for a blessed eternity!

S E R M O N XIV.

RELIGION THE ONLY TRUE SOURCE
OF HAPPINESS.

PSALM IV. 6.

*There be many that say, Who will shew us
any good? Lord, lift thou up the light
of thy countenance upon us.*

HOW widely soever men differ in
other things, yet in this it is mani-
fest they all agree, that true happiness is
their ultimate end. Learned and igno-
rant, wise men and foolish, the righteous
and the wicked, do all consent in this
N 4 point;

point; and the only difference between them lies, in determining wherein their true happiness consists, and by what methods it may best be attained. As many as make a right judgment in this matter, and act accordingly in the whole course of their lives; these are wise and good, rational and virtuous men: they on the contrary, who place their happiness in a wrong object, or pursue it by improper and unrighteous means, are ignorant and wicked. Yet nevertheless all men equally intend to pursue their own happiness; and even they who make themselves the most extremely miserable by the greatest follies and most destructive vices, even these are still seduced into it by some false pretence, and some appearance of happiness: only this their error proceeds from their own negligence or wilfulness; they are what our Saviour calls fools and blind; and that makes them altogether inexcusable. Daily experience shows, how insatiably ambitious men pursue after honour; and frequently sacrifice all sense of virtue, and the satisfaction of a good conscience, for the attainment of a vain imaginary greatness: likewise how unreasonably covetous and
oppressive

oppressive men, suffer fatigue of body, and uneasiness of mind, in the unrighteous pursuit of what they hardly ever enjoy: and how absurdly the voluptuous destroy themselves in following after pleasure; and for momentary gratifications of brutal folly, bring upon themselves frequently the acutest pains of body, and the much more intolerable burden of a tormented mind. On the other side, dying men, who look back with an unprejudiced eye on all these short-lived vanities, and who are now drawing near to that unchangeable period, which is to fix their condition in the world to come; how meanly, how contemptibly do they always think, of all the sinful, nay even innocent enjoyments of this present world! And what a great, what a just concern are they under, in respect of their future state, that is, in respect of that state, wherein now their only hope of happiness remains! And not with regard to eternity only, but even in this present life itself, true religion is so far from discouraging men in their search after happiness, that it forbids not the enjoyment of any one temporal blessing which God has created for the use of man, but only

those disorderly actions, or unreasonable excesses, by which foolish men make both themselves and others miserable. Thus self-evident it is, that all men are necessarily by the very direction of their nature employed in the pursuit after happiness; There be many that say; that is, all men naturally inquire, who will shew us any good?

Wicked and corrupt men seek this happiness in the sinful enjoyments of the present life; and their choosing so to do, is their great error and folly. That too great a part of men, are like the beasts that perish, wholly intent upon the sensual enjoyments of this present life; without any regard to the dictates of reason, or the obligations of religion; and that they have very little and slight concern for what is to come hereafter; is too evident to be denied. But then it is also no less evident to any one who considers the true nature and final issue of things, that such persons act to the highest degree irrationally and unwisely; and that the things, by the enjoyment of which they propose to be happy, are by no means sufficient to that end. The enjoyments of this present world are ranked by St.
John

John under these three heads, “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life;” that is, pleasure, riches, and honour. These are, as the Apostle there styles them, all that is in the world, that is, all the happiness that this present world can afford. But now every one of these in particular, even where the enjoyment of them is innocent, much more when the sting of sin is annexed, has a great mixture of evil attending it, has at best much emptiness and imperfection in it, has much unsatisfactoriness and disappointment going along with it: and all of them taken together, are far from being able to make a man truly happy, because they still want the two principal and most necessary qualifications of happiness, that is, perfection of degree, and continuance in duration; they are not at best complete enough to satisfy the mind of man; and, if they were, yet they cannot continue long enough to maintain and preserve its happiness.

To instance in pleasure, that great idol of mankind; for the sake of which, all other things are desired; and which alone has the greatest pretence to make

men happy; this itself, is of all other things the most imperfect and disappointing, and has the most evil mixed with it and consequent upon it. By pleasure, I would here be understood to mean, sensual pleasure; that is, such as vicious and debauched persons call by that name; sensual pleasure, or voluptuousness, as it is opposed to the rational and temperate enjoyments of a virtuous man and a good christian. For otherwise, pleasure in general, as it is the enjoyment of good, and the desire of pleasure as it signifies the love of ourselves and the seeking our own happiness, is one of the first and most natural principles implanted in mankind, which neither ought nor can be laid aside by any man: and this very principle itself affords an undeniable argument, why men ought willingly to part with the short and unreasonable pleasures of sin, for the unchangeable and eternal happiness of heaven. When therefore we affirm that pleasure is entirely insufficient to make any person truly happy, we are always to understand such sensual pleasure, as vicious and debauched men fix their thoughts upon, in opposition to the wise and rational pleasures

fures of temperance and religion. Now, that pleasure, in this sense, is very far from making men happy, is evident both from experience and from the reason of things. For no men plainly are so extremely miserable, as those who thus pretend to be the greatest voluptuaries. They toil and labour for that which is not, and are frequently disappointed of what they most desire, and undergo perpetual uneasiness both of body and mind, and endure much labour for momentary pleasures; for pleasures which themselves are nothing but disappointment at the best, far short of what their vain imaginations represented, and are allayed with innumerable mixtures of pain and trouble, and end in sorrow and delusion, and leave behind them nothing but remorse and repentance: and how can such persons as these esteem themselves happy?

Riches, the next object wherein corrupt minds usually place their happiness, are no less insufficient to that end, than sensual pleasure. In the hands of generous and worthy men, of charitable and pious christians, they may indeed become instruments of great benefit, occasions of much advantage to religion, and means
of

of true happiness. But to make a vicious man happy, a man whose happiness is not founded in God and religion, they are altogether ineffectual. For, besides the uncertainty of the things themselves, that "riches often make themselves wings and fly away;" they are moreover, as Solomon wisely observes, "often kept by the owners thereof to their hurt;" to serve the ends of oppression, unrighteousness, and debauchery.

Lastly; Honour, that great hope and aim of the ambitious, is neither a real good, nor can it be called our own. The virtues for which a worthy man is honoured, are far more valuable than the honour which the world pays to his worth; and these virtues can alone remain with him, when perhaps that honour and esteem may be turned into reproach. For in this erroneous world, men are frequently honoured for what is truly dishonourable, and sometimes they are calumniated for that which really deserves the highest praises. Now it is evident that one man cannot be made truly happy or unhappy, by another's false and mistaken opinion: for this were to make the happiness of the best and wisest men, depend

depend upon the weak and false imaginations of the most ignorant and foolish. The honour therefore and applause of a deceitful world, cannot really make a man happy, nor the want of it be the cause of a wise man's misery.

Add to all this, that besides the peculiar insufficiency of every one of these objects, pleasure, riches and honour, each considered in themselves; they are moreover each of them destroyed, as to their power of making men happy, by the want of either or both of the other. Nay, supposing a man to enjoy every one and all of them together, in the greatest fulness and affluence imaginable; yet even still they would want the two principal and most necessary qualifications requisite to make a man truly happy; namely, perfection in degree, and continuance of duration. They cannot at best compleat the satisfaction of the mind; and if they were able to do this, yet they could not continue long enough to maintain and preserve it. Whatever will make the mind of man happy, must be able to satisfy it both in its whole capacity and in its whole duration; and whatever is not sufficient to effect
this,

this, cannot be our chief and final happiness. Now all those things wherein worldly and irreligious minds usually place their happiness, are at best greatly deficient in these two respects.

They cannot make us happy in the whole, nor in the best part of our capacity. Man consists of a sensitive body and of a rational soul, and it is either necessary to his well-being that he be happy in both these parts; or, if he may possibly be happy by the satisfaction of a virtuous mind without any sensual and bodily pleasures; yet it is very evident he cannot on the other side, be made happy by the pleasures of the body only, without the satisfaction of a virtuous mind. The capacity of man's mind is great; and its desires and expectations, its hopes and fears are boundless: and it is well known by experience, that all the enjoyments of the present life, without virtue and true religion, can by no means either satisfy its desires and expectations, or prevent its fears and discontents. These things therefore, are greatly insufficient to make a man truly happy, since they cannot make him

him so in the best and principal part of his being.

But supposing they were able to satisfy the whole capacity of a man's mind, yet they could not make him happy for the whole, nor for the greatest part of his duration. Dying men are always sufficiently sensible of this; and living men, if they were wise, would see and understand this most important truth, before their eyes were too late opened by the extremity of that last necessity. Nothing can be more evident than that eternity bears no proportion to time; and nothing can be plainer, than that these things which men dote upon now in the present time, will do them no service in the ages of eternity: why then will they not see, that these things are not their true and proper happiness? But all wicked and debauched persons are infatuated and blinded, and will place their happiness in that which profiteth not. This therefore their opinion is their folly, and if they live according to it, must be their destruction.

On the contrary, virtuous men place their chief happiness in the knowledge and favour of God; in the practice of
virtue

virtue and true religion ; and their acting according to this principle, is the greatest and indeed the only true wisdom: "there be many that say, who will shew us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us." For the clearer explication of which proposition, I shall endeavour briefly to set forth, wherein this true happiness consists ; and in what respects it excels the happiness of sensual and corrupt minds.

The first part of the happiness of good men consists in their contemplating with delight, and meditating with pleasure, on the perfections of God the supreme good. These perfections are manifested in the works, and in the laws of God ; and good men according to their several capacities, contemplate with pleasure, and meditate with delight, upon the several manifestations of these divine perfections. Virtuous minds, even of the meanest capacities, see enough in the most obvious and superficial view of the Divine works, to excite in them a deep sense and admiration of the almighty power, the unsearchable wisdom, and the eternal providence of God ; and they see enough in the first and most easy representation of his laws,
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to fill their thoughts with the most awful fear of his justice, and with the most ardent love of his abundant goodness. But good men of larger capacities and greater advantages, see yet further into the wisdom of the works and of the laws of God: the contemplation therefore of these things, affords a great and solid satisfaction to virtuous and religious minds; and this satisfaction will grow up with the improvements of their knowledge and virtue here, to a perfect and unspeakable happiness in the enjoyments of the world to come.

The next part of the happiness of virtuous and good men, is the sense of God's present favour to them, arising from the consciousness of their conformity to his holy and divine will. They know both from their natural idea of God, and from the revealed declarations of his will, that the light of his countenance is, as the text expresses it, lift up upon the righteous, that is, that his favour and protection always accompanies righteous and just men; and by the testimony of their own conscience, compared with the written word of God, they know and humbly rejoice that they themselves

selves are in some measure such. The favour therefore that God bears to virtuous and good men, they find belongs to themselves; and this affords them at all times and in all cases, a solid and rational satisfaction. There is a careless ease which arises from error, and there is a delusive pleasure which arises from wickedness; but both these satisfactions are short and inconstant; and they lead to folly, and terminate in misery. But this happiness of virtuous and religious minds, which arises from the practice of virtue and from the favour of God, is as certain and constant as the nature and constitution of things, as the truth and veracity of God; and cannot be taken from them, even by persecution itself.

Finally; This happiness of righteous and good men is completed and perfected, by the expectation of eternal rewards, with which hope they are supported here; and by the actual possession of them, which they shall enjoy hereafter. This is a happiness equal to the desires and hopes of an immortal soul; a happiness, worthy of God to give, and adequate to the capacity of an immortal spirit to desire. In this state, all the desires and expectatious

expectations of the soul will be turned into fruition; and all its hopes will be swallowed up in the real enjoyment of inexpressible felicity. In a word, all its faculties and capacities will here be satisfied, and that satisfaction will live and continue, as long as the immortal soul itself.

Having thus briefly described, what the happiness of righteous and good men is; I presume we need not to enter into a particular comparison of it with the happiness of vicious and corrupt minds, to show in what respects it is superior to theirs; and to demonstrate that to prefer this solid and substantial happiness, before the empty and deceitful pleasures of sin, is the greatest and indeed the only true wisdom. I shall only observe in a word, that this happiness, which is the reward of virtue, exceeds all other pleasures infinitely, in the two forementioned essential qualifications of happiness; perfection in degree, and continuance of duration. The Psalmist thus describes them both: "In thy presence is fulness of joy, and at thy right hand are pleasures for evermore."

The application, wherewith I shall conclude

conclude, shall be this only : that from what has been said, there arises matter of great comfort to virtuous and good men at all times, but especially at the hour of death. Vicious minds place their happiness in the enjoyment of the pleasures of this sinful world ; and when this world comes to an end, as it does to every man at the conclusion of his own life ; where then will their happiness be ? But he that places his happiness in the knowledge, and love, and imitation of God, in following the dictates of reason and true religion, here ; shall enjoy it also in these things hereafter ; for God, and his perfections, continue for ever. And when the righteous shall shine forth in that day, as the sun in the kingdom of their Father ; then shall the wicked be sensible of their own folly, and shall cry out, as it is most elegantly expressed in the book of Wisdom : “ We fools accounted his life madness, and his end “ to be without honour ; how is he numbered among the children of God, and “ his lot is among the saints ! ”

S E R.

S E R M O N X V .

ON DILIGENCE.

ROMANS XII. II.

Not slothful in business.

EVERY man has two general concerns upon his hands of great weight and importance, answerable to the two kinds of existence through which he is to pass; namely, the present life, and that which is to come: for both which it is incumbent on him to make suitable provision. The one is indeed
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of much greater importance than the other, and therefore merits a proportionable share of his endeavours. The happiness of the next life, or the business of eternity, is of infinite consequence, and requires our utmost diligence and care. Nevertheless the concerns of this world are by no means to be neglected. A due attendance upon these is not inconsistent with the prosecution of the other; but, on the contrary, tends to further and promote it. Worldly industry, under proper restraints and regulations, is a great friend to religion and virtue; as I shall have occasion to observe more at large in the progress of this discourse. For which reason it cannot be a subject unworthy of our consideration. And indeed the caution in the text relates wholly to it. The meaning of which is, that men must, by no means, give themselves up to idleness or sloth; but must diligently pursue their respective vocations, and be industrious in that state of life to which it has pleased God to call them.

I shall not offer upon this subject, to mark out the bounds and limits of industry, or to shew precisely to what measure
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and degree men are to be diligent in their several ways of life. That is not perhaps possible to be done, considering mens different circumstances and conditions, which require different degrees of industry and labour. Some are obliged to take more pains, and to be more laborious than others; whose condition of life exempts them from so great a degree of toil, by making it neither necessary nor expedient. However idleness is the privilege of none: it is criminal in all, and prejudicial to all in many respects. But of this more hereafter. In the meantime it must be observed that worldly industry is capable of being carried to excess, not only as it may become detrimental to health, which is comparatively but a small consideration; but as it may entrench upon the concerns of the other life: which being as I took notice before, of far the greatest moment, must in no wise be broken in upon by any concerns belonging to this.

Thus then our application to worldly business must be limited and confined. We must make our spiritual calling and election sure, whatever become of our temporal callings. But to shew more

particularly how far men ought to be diligent and industrious in their respective employments, is neither possible nor needful. Every one may know how to apply the general precept to his own case and circumstances. If a man is but convinced, that he ought to be industrious, and is thereupon resolved so to be, he will discover readily enough how to proportion his industry to his condition and state of life. I shall content myself therefore with endeavouring to persuade men to comply in general with the caution in the text, by shewing the necessity of industry, and the several advantages which belong to it.

In order to which it must be considered, that the world cannot subsist without labour and pains. Some indeed may be excused, and ever will be exempted from the drudging part of business; but still even these cannot be wholly idle and unemployed without damage to the public, as well as disadvantage to themselves. However the generality of mankind must labour. The necessities of life require a great deal of pains, and the comforts and conveniences of it require much more. God could indeed, if he had so pleased, have

have maintained the world without men's labour : he could have made such provision for them, as would have supplied all their wants, and furnished all their occasions, without any contribution of their endeavours. The earth might have been made to have yielded its increase of its own accord, and have poured out its fruits without any human care or cultivation. Every climate might have abounded with whatever could be desired for use or ornament, without any dependance on others. In a word, nature might have been made so rich and fruitful in every respect, as to have rendered art useless, and labour superfluous. But Providence was pleased to order matters otherwise ; and we may be sure upon very weighty and important accounts : as will more fully appear if we proceed to consider the advantages of industry, and the danger and disadvantage of being " slothful in business."

I shall begin with those temporal advantages which flow from industry, and then proceed to shew the good influence which it has upon our spiritual interest. To justify my insisting on the former of these, I desire it may be considered, that

in scripture we meet with frequent commendations of industry drawn from this very topic. Particularly by the wise man, who dwells much upon it. We may take notice then in the first place, how much the public is indebted to industry and diligence. To this are owing the birth and improvement of arts and sciences, which contribute so much both to the use and embellishment of life, and serve to lift men up so much above inferior ranks of creatures. Accordingly those nations which have made but little progress therein, are found to be barbarous and uncivilized: the countries wild and desolate, and the men savages. Great and numberless are the advantages, which men derive from arts and sciences, and consequently from industry, by which they are both begun and carried on. An industrious people may not indeed always prosper and flourish, because they may lie under the disadvantage of an unhappy government, or other inconveniences, which may keep them low, and disappoint their diligence. But there cannot be a flourishing people without industry, whatever other advantages they may be possessed of. For, without this the benefits
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of nature must be, in a great measure, lost, and the blessings of Providence thrown away. There are flourishing nations in the world, that wholly owe their power and prosperity, next to the blessing of Heaven, to their being remarkably industrious, which has raised and advanced them, in spite of many great obstacles and discouraging difficulties that stood in their way. And there are other nations, which notwithstanding many and great natural advantages, have never distinguished themselves for want of taking the pains necessary thereto. Their sloth has kept them down; and buried them in obscurity. Or perhaps they have become a prey to other more active nations, and been spoiled of their riches, as well as deprived of their liberty. Those natural blessings which they suffer to lie unimproved, have tempted others to invade and over-run their country. And thus they have fallen a public sacrifice to their own sloth and inactivity. As liberty is a great promoter and encourager of industry, so industry is the best guard to liberty. Strength and power avail nothing, if they be not exerted; and exerted they cannot be to advantage, without pains and industry. Thus sloth

naturally tends to slavery, as well as poverty. Nor is it any wonder that Providence should frequently suffer those hands to be tied, which would not work when they were at liberty. An industrious people have the best title to the protection of Heaven, whilst the lazy are left destitute, and abandoned to the ill effects of their own sluggishness. "The hand of the diligent shall bear rule," says the wise man, "but the slothful shall be under tribute."

Having thus briefly touched upon the advantages of industry with relation to the public, I shall now consider the temporal advantages which accrue from it to particular persons. The tendency which it has to raise men in the world is so clear and manifest, that it is needless to insist upon it. Ordinarily speaking, it is the only way to wealth, which cannot be acquired without it. Men indeed may inherit riches, and be wealthy that way without pains. But even then without industry they cannot improve them, nor perhaps keep what they have. And besides, idleness naturally brings them into such courses as tend to waste their fortunes, and reduce them to want. And

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as to those who have their fortunes to make, they must necessarily take pains. They may as well pretend to be wise without instruction, as rich without diligence. If a man's condition be very low, he must labour for a subsistence. And if it be moderate, he must be industrious, if he will advance it. This is too evident to need a proof. He must needs "become poor that dealeth with a slack hand," according to Solomon's observation, "but the hand of the diligent maketh rich." And as men thus get by being diligent, so they thrive in a double respect. The same royal author tells us, that "the substance of a diligent man is precious." His diligence first brings him in gain, and then contributes to secure it when it is got. He whose wealth is of his own acquiring, is likeliest to understand the value of it. He knows how he got it, and will therefore know how he spends it. Thus his substance will wear well, and make a better proof upon this account. Besides, the blessing of Heaven goes along with his labours, and prospers his endeavours. What is got by honest industry, has the protection of Providence for its security. And

this matter has confirmation from the mouth of the same author; "Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished; but he that gathereth by labour shall increase." Honour likewise, as well as wealth, must be obtained by these means. Industry is the high road to preferment, which, ordinarily speaking, cannot be arrived at any other way. "Seest thou," says the same wise prince, "a man diligent in his business, he shall stand before kings, he shall not stand before mean men."

As industry makes men prosper in the world, and advances their conditions, so perhaps it might not be improper to add, that it contributes to the preservation of health. Human bodies are framed after such a manner, as to stand in constant need of exercise. And no doubt this was contrived so by Providence, on purpose to keep them in employment. We may look upon it as a natural check upon sloth, and a kind of security to the pursuit of business, that no motive whatsoever might be wanting to spur man on to that labour and industry for which he was designed. There is no doubt but business may be immoderately followed, and that

that a man may be sometimes too industrious, and thereby prejudice himself in this respect. And so may any virtue run into an extreme, and there lose itself. This is no disparagement to industry, when governed by the rules of discretion. Moderate labour is nevertheless beneficial, or rather necessary. Those who are skilled in the nature of human bodies do assign reasons for it, and shew how it comes to pass. It is universally confessed, that sloth is an enemy to health, and moderate labour or exercise very advantageous. And this truth is abundantly confirmed by experience. Long life being most frequently to be found among the laborious part of mankind. Accordingly it is observable, that they who decline business, do nevertheless follow it, as it were under disguise. They sometimes labour, and take as much pains in the pursuit of diversions, as others do about the most weighty employments. And was not health supported by this expedient, every man would be forced to submit to business, or he must cut short the thread of his life. In short, idleness may be looked upon as a dead weight upon a man's constitution. It fills him full of

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infirmities,

infirmities, and naturally tends to shorten his days. As if nature had intended, that he who was resolved to do but little good in the world, should not stay long in it, but should be cut off as an unprofitable member, and a nuisance to society. From what has been said it appears, that we may properly enough say of industry, what the wise man says of wisdom, "length of days is in her right hand, and in her left hand riches and honour."

We may consider, in the next place, the pleasure and satisfaction which redounds from the pursuit of any honest employment. As to which it must be granted, that men's inclinations do not always lead them to business; but then it is because they are depraved. A wicked man thinks virtue unpleasant: so likewise a vitiated palate can relish nothing that is wholesome. In like manner where idleness has got possession, business becomes a grievance. But still in itself it is valuable in this respect. Custom indeed bears a great sway in this, as in all other cases. Those who have inured themselves to business and employment, do very often like it so well, that they know not how to live without it. It
must

must undoubtedly therefore be pleasant to them. Perhaps it is gain which greatly contributes to make it so. Let what will make it so, if the motive be honest, no objection can be drawn from thence. Lawful gain may certainly be lawfully followed. But doubtless a man may take a pleasure in being industrious, and minding his business, upon further views than barely the love of gain. His very employment may be pleasing and delightful to him, taken abstractedly from other considerations. However, he may find great satisfaction in industry, as it is a part of his duty, as it is pleasing and acceptable in the sight of God, as it enables him to do good in his generation, and more particularly to "provide for his own household," which whosoever neglects, is, as the Apostle declares, "worse than an infidel." Not to mention his having an eye upon those spiritual advantages, which I have not yet considered. So that a man may take pleasure in business, both upon its own account, and for the sake of those many advantages which attend it. If it be said, that hard labour is troublesome and painful; yet nevertheless custom will, in a great measure,

render it otherwise. However, there are two things to be duly considered: the one is, that hard labour, whatever it be in itself, is much pleasanter than constant idleness. Doing nothing is certainly the hardest labour that man can undergo. It is the most restless and uneasy state imaginable. And so it may well be, because it is repugnant to the nature of man's mind, the very essence of which is action. When a man has no employment for his thoughts, they are apt to work inwards, and prey upon themselves. A slothful man's time is a greater burthen to him, than a laborious man's work. The latter knows how to dispatch the one; but the former knows not how to get rid of the other. It still hangs upon his hands, and perpetually troubles and torments him. As rest gives refreshment to a laborious man; so an idle man can find no ease till he takes up some business or employment. Which brings me to the other thing to be considered; namely, that as hard labour is better than idleness; so it greatly recommends rest to a man, and gives him a true relish of it. The slothful man is glutted and surfeited with his ease; but that leisure, which the industrious

trious man finds in his intermissions from business, is truly delightful to him. Labour indeed and rest do mutually recommend each other; not only for the pleasure of variety, but as the succession is agreeable to nature. When a man is wearied with toil and business, his spirits are sunk, and he finds and feels he wants rest. Upon this account it is welcome when it arrives. So likewise when he is refreshed, and his strength and vigour return, his appetite for business returns along with them; and he goes to his work with the same alacrity that he came from it. This is nothing but what is natural, and for that reason must be pleasant to all, but such as are befotted with sloth. It appears from hence, as if Providence designed men the true enjoyment of no blessings whatsoever, without the price of labour. Since even rest has a natural kind of tax set upon it. Though a man may get rest, without antecedent labour, yet it is then of no value, nor will it do him any good. If he intends to enjoy it, he must take some pains before-hand. As a man must fast a convenient time, if he will have an appetite to his food; so he must employ himself some way or other,
were

were it for nothing but to get an appetite to rest. Ease to the laborious man, is as grateful as food to the hungry; but to the idle man, it is like feeding upon a full stomach.

Industry is moreover of great importance as it makes men useful members of a commonwealth, and enables them to do much good in a private capacity, to their neighbours, friends, and relations. It puts it into their power to exercise acts of charity, relieve the needy, and succour those in distress. Thus when the Apostle enjoins labour, and requires men to "work with their hands the thing which is good," one end which he has in view is, "that they may have to give to him that needeth." But the greatest advantage of industry is, that it contributes so greatly to the preservation of innocence, by securing men from the ill effects of sloth. Idleness is the great inlet to licentiousness, and tends to all manner of vice and immorality. It corrupts the principles of religion, and opens a door to all kinds of sin and wickedness. There is but a short step from doing nothing to doing mischief. The mind of man will not sleep; but his thoughts and his passions

ons will drive at something. He is prone to evil, and will naturally run into it, if due employments be wanting to correct the bias. When men have nothing to do, they soon grow sick of their own company. The entertainments of learning, of nature, of reason, are not agreeable to the bulk of mankind, who have neither capacity nor relish for things of this kind. Idleness therefore gives full scope to all sorts of temptations, against which the mind is utterly unguarded. It draws men into ill company, and exposes them to the infection of all those vices, which are there to be met with. In a word, men hereby lie open to all the solicitations of sin, and the prevailing influence of ill examples.

It were well if the ill effects of idleness terminated in those who were guilty of it, and reached no further. But as it dishonours God, and is in every respect pernicious to a man's self; so it has a great tendency to make him transgress against his neighbour. And thus it becomes, in a new respect, prejudicial to the public. As an idle person is peculiarly liable to the contagion of other men's vices, so others are in danger of being
affected

affected by his idleness. It is his custom to put a stop where he can to other men's business, as well as his own; as well to keep himself in countenance, as to encourage his beloved sloth. It is natural for such persons to endeavour to get companions as idle as themselves, and consequently if they do not find them, to make them such. This perhaps being the only instance of their taking pains. Thus other men are brought into a snare, and oftentimes ruined by these means. And thus likewise business is interrupted to the detriment of the public.

But further; Idleness, as was observed before, reduces men to want, and tends directly to poverty. If a man be low in the world, it will keep him so; and if he enjoy a fair fortune, idleness will find means to sink it. And when he is brought to this pass, he must necessarily either work, or do worse: it is not likely that he will even then take up with working, as having been accustomed to idleness. And thus he naturally falls to stealing, as the likeliest method to supply his wants, in an easy and cheap way. Hereby he thinks he can gratify his sloth, and at the same time reap the fruits of other men's

men's labour. Thus we see idleness brings men into the most enormous crimes. And here again likewise the public suffers greatly by it. Could nothing more be said for industry, than that it tends to keep men just and honest, even this would surely be a character sufficient to recommend it. Could nothing more be said against idleness, than that it tends to theft, and all kinds of wrong and injustice, even this might well be thought enough to make men dread and detest it.

Lastly; Idleness tends to disturb the peace of society. Intermeddling in other mens concerns generally ends in difference and disagreement. It kindles contentions, and creates feuds and animosities. Now idleness is frequently at the bottom of this mischief. What contributes so much to make men meddle with the affairs of others, as neglecting their own? Did they mind their own business, they would have little leisure or inclination to intrude into other mens. And the more diligent they were at home, the less curious or busy they would be abroad. "We hear" says the Apostle, to the Thessalonians, "that there are some which
" walk

“ walk among you disorderly, working
“ not at all, but are busy bodies;” there-
by plainly signifying the latter to be the
effect of the former. “ Now them, con-
“ tinues he, that are such, we command
“ and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ,
“ that with quietness they work, and eat
“ their own bread.” And it is certain,
that industry is an excellent expedient for
the maintenance of peace, and the pre-
servation of love and unity. A diligent
attendance upon men’s callings and em-
ployments cuts off many opportunities of
dissensions, and prevents those differences
and ruptures, which are the natural con-
sequences of idleness and sloth.

Thus we see how highly advantageous
industry is to religion, by promoting ma-
ny branches of men’s duty; by securing
their innocence in general, and keeping
them out of many temptations, mischiefs,
and snares, which they will otherwise un-
avoidably fall into. It is not indeed an
absolute security. A man may take ill
measures, follow bad courses, in an in-
dustrious way; but industry is not to be
blamed for that. Besides, if an indus-
trious man may, an idle man must go a-
stray. There is this mighty difference
between

between them, that whereas the one may be guilty, the other cannot be innocent.

To conclude; It behoves, however, the industrious to take care, that while they apply themselves so diligently to the affairs of this world, they by no means neglect the more weighty concerns of the next: That they suffer not worldly business wholly to engross their thoughts and endeavours; lest, while they are thus carefully employed about "things temporal, they finally lose the things that are eternal."

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